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#SheenaMurderMystery

DIAL M FOR MURDER

AMBITIOUS SMALL-TOWN GIRL. RELATIONSHIP HOPPER. SOCIAL CLIMBER.
ACE HEADHUNTER. MEDIA BARONESS. ALLEGED DAUGHTER KILLER.

WHO IS THE REAL INDRANI MUKERJEA?

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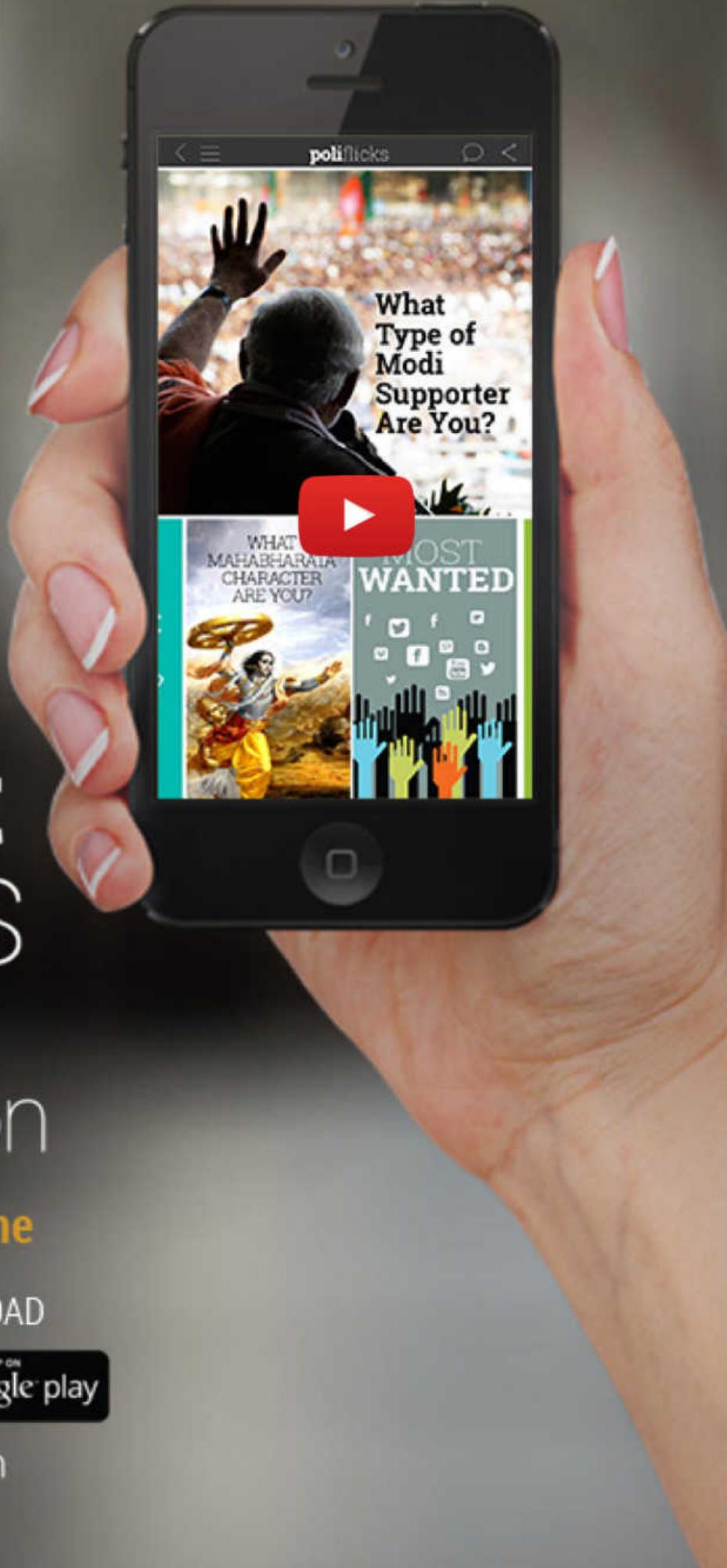
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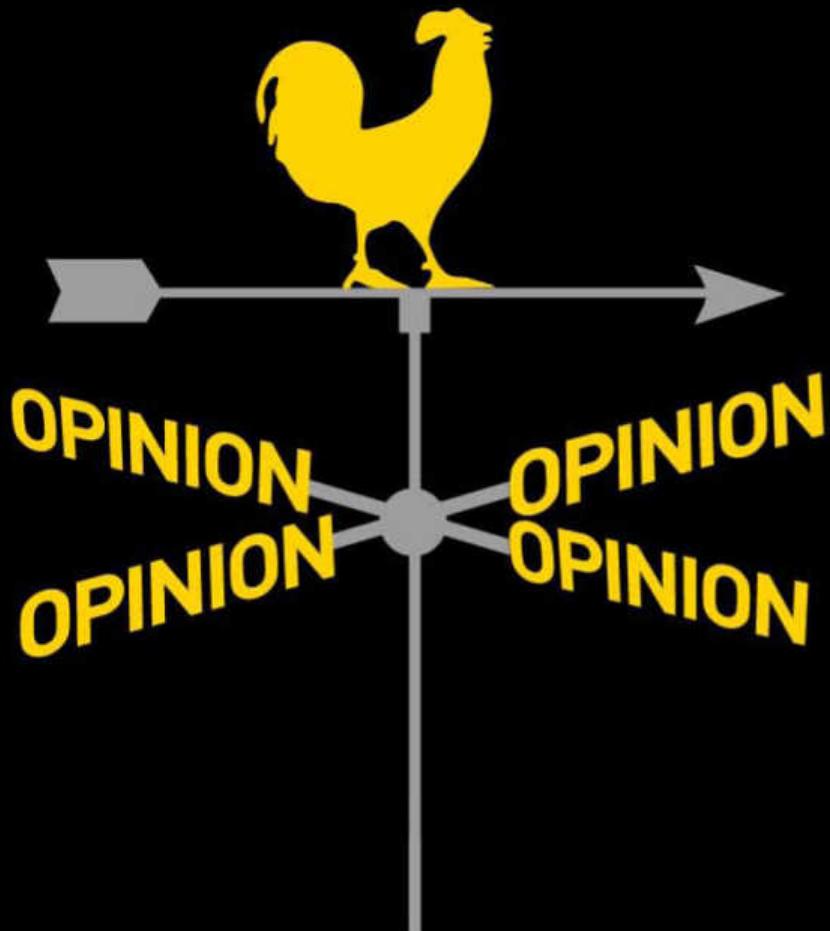
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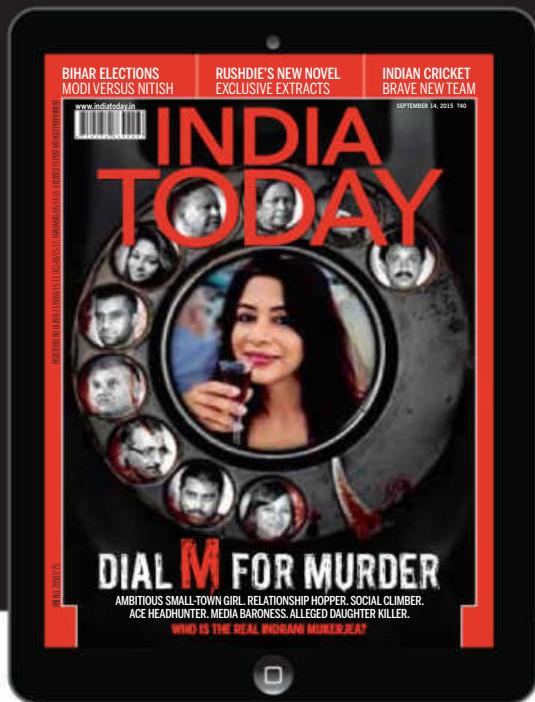




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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Every once in a rare while, a story comes our way that punches us in the gut, shocks us out of our settled assumptions, stokes a primal curiosity and leaves us bewildered with every grotesque twist and turn. It appears to walk a thin line between fact and fiction and sweeps aside far weightier issues that should deserve our attention. The Chinese economy is in dire straits, our stock markets are tanking with the rest of the world, the rupee is in free fall, Gujarat burned, Manipur is burning and the battle for Bihar is beginning to boil, but we have been transfixed by the bizarre spectacle of a former media baroness being arrested for allegedly killing her own daughter three years ago and getting rid of the body in the jungles with the help of an ex-husband and a driver. Why?

It may seem like a macabre fascination with a diabolical crime involving high society, or PLUs if you will, but there is more to it than that. "The average person who has been socialised to respect life, and who also possesses the normal range of emotions such as love, shame, pity and remorse, cannot comprehend the workings of a pathological mind that would compel one to abduct, torture, rape, kill..." Scott Bonn, a professor of sociology and criminology at Drew University in the United States, wrote last year in the context of why people are fascinated by serial killers. The incomprehensibility of such actions drives people to try and understand the reasons and motives of those accused of such horrible crimes, Bonn wrote.

This could very well also be said of the alleged murder of 25-year-old Sheena Bora by her mother Indrani Mukerjea and her accomplices in 2012. The crime Indrani is being accused of, although not completely unheard of, questions our basic inferences of human nature. Add to that the emerging "back story" of Indrani and we have an extremely compelling mystery at hand. While it is for the investigators to figure out the crime and establish the truth, our cover story seeks to piece together the roller-coaster life and times of the woman at the centre of it all. And through that try and get a sense of the whats, whys and hows of the Sheena Bora-Indrani Mukerjea saga.

Our correspondents travelled to Guwahati and Kolkata to speak to the family and friends Indrani left behind in those cities while correspondents in Mumbai and Delhi meticulously gathered information about the rise and fall of Indrani, the high-flier, since she moved to Mumbai in 2001 and became a media entrepreneur. The picture that emerges is one of an eventful life that began in the backyard of Guwahati and went through several transformative makeovers before she ended up as the suave and polished first lady of Indian television—until the horrific twist in the tale. It is a script that would make any sitcom writer in Mumbai proud. Unfortunately though, it all seems real, as real as what television could come up with, if not more.

As the investigation makes progress and more sordid details spill out, the Indrani saga will leave us with more larger questions about society, crime and human nature. Whether Indrani is guilty or not, it will push us to dissect notions such as ambition, greed, insecurity and hatred, among others, in the context of our personal and professional lives in an aspirational and changing India. It may not make for a pretty picture. But then not everything in the mirror can look good.



OUR JANUARY
2012 COVER


(Aroon Purie)

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COVER STORY
INDRANI MUKERJEA

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The back story of a woman who has the nation transfixed, from the small-town Indrani Bora of Guwahati to the reinvented Indrani Khanna of Kolkata to Mrs Peter Mukerjea.

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In a matter of four rallies in five weeks, PM Modi has turned the BJP around from playing catch-up. It's now setting the agenda and making the Nitish-Lalu combine sweat.



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Dancing Shiva, the superhero; Mumbai, a city to which he cannot return; an election that turfs out the party of National Relatives; and a war of worlds between humans and jinns. Salman Rushdie's new novel is a product of our irrational times.

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The BJP flaunts a muscular Hindutva in a state where nearly half the population is Muslim and Christian. The agenda: consolidate the 55 per cent Hindu vote.

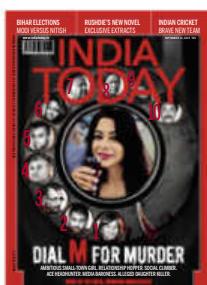
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Indrani Mukerjea (Middle)

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- 10 Siddhartha Das

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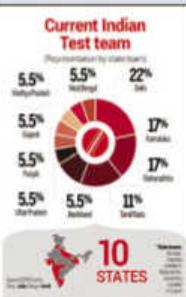
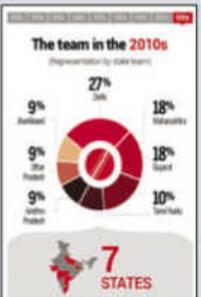
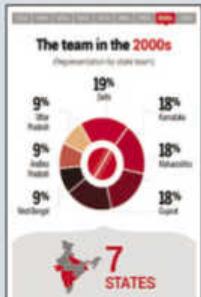
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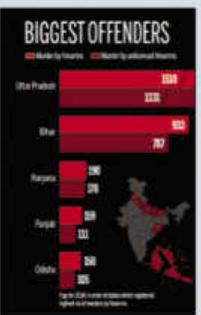
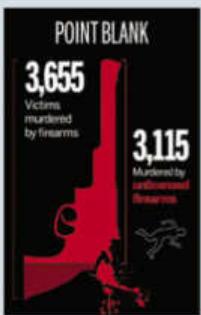
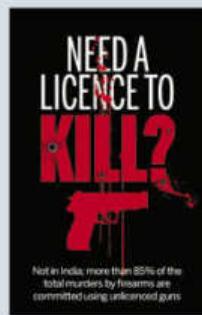
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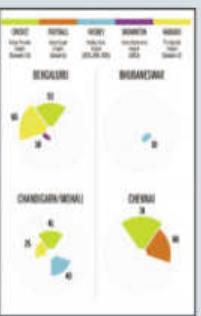
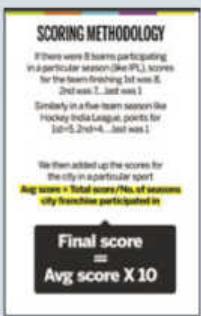
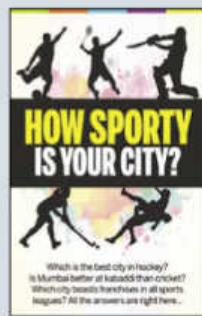
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Know the score Cricket, kabaddi or hockey? Is your city in the same league as others who boast franchises in all sports leagues? <http://bit.ly/1KrzDwV>



MOST SHARED ON FACEBOOK

On this day, Princess Diana died in a car crash in Paris

514

You will always be there in our minds Kalam sir!

465

The 900-year-old 'Parrot Lady' sculpture from Khajuraho

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We love Shahid, Mira Rajput's first appearance at Lakme Fashion Week

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Shahid Kapoor: I wanted to work with Alia Bhatt

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The 900-year-old 'Parrot Lady' sculpture from Khajuraho

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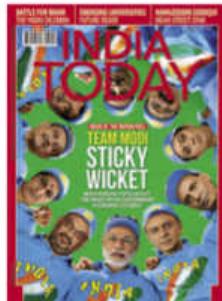
Going to study abroad? Handle the visa interview like a pro!

189,729

Sticky Wicket

AUGUST 31, 2015

Modi remains popular but the image of his government is eroding steadily



Narendra Modi must come clean on his decision to retain tainted ministers such as Sushma Swaraj in his cabinet. His silence has hit his credibility.

ABHINAV SHARMA, Jaipur

End of the Dream Run

India is not an easy country to change, nor is it easy to govern (For Team Modi, Now or Never, August 31). Here, people are reluctant to embrace short-term pain for long-term gain. The politics of subsidy and reservations have hurt the progress of the country. The Prime Minister is making genuine efforts to ensure that people get better opportunities to grow and excel without the crutches of free goodies.

K.R. NAMBIAR, Mumbai

A year is too less a time to judge the performance of a government. The previous UPA-led government left behind a legacy of stalled projects and slow growth. It will take time for the PM to turn things around. The process has begun but it may take a while for the results to show.

MAYA AGARWAL, Kanpur

It is no wonder that ratings of the Modi-led government have plummeted

rapidly over the past 15 months. The PM excels in being a great orator and a dream merchant. When it comes to execution, he scores a zero. Be it the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or the Clean Ganga project, all programmes started with a bang but soon fizzled out.

AMBAR MALICK, Kolkata

Caste Politics Can't Win All



Amitabh Srivastava provides a very realistic assessment of the political fortunes of Lalu Prasad, whose desperation to ensure a future for his sons is more than apparent as he takes the stage ahead of the elections (Hurdles for the Herder, August 31). Lalu is unable to feel the pulse of the next-generation Yadavs who are no longer content with the tag of "ruling clan" of Bihar, but would like to get better opportunities in education, health and employment. His lack of vision for a young Bihar and overconfidence in his old caste politics may eventually bring an end to his political career after this assembly election.

R.R. SINHA, via email



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FOR TEAM MODI,
NOW OR NEVER

Agreed that Narendra Modi is not up to the mark. But can we trust Rahul Gandhi for the top job?

Ramesh

The government should take the poll feedback as a message for improvement. PM Modi remains by far India's best bet.

Ashok

MODI TO WALK OROP TALK

One Rank, One Pension must be granted to ex-servicemen. Narendra Modi had promised it not once but several times while seeking votes.

Vicki Sharma

WHY LALIT MODI IS STILL ON THE FRONT FOOT

Britain should not give shelter to someone who is an accused in several cases of laundering and financial irregularities.

Raghava Rao Karavadi

Narendra Modi got an overwhelming mandate due to a carefully crafted campaign that projected him as the harbinger of change. Over a year later, the veneer of a too-good-to-believe leader is beginning to fade to reveal a person who is unable to deliver on his promises. Modi must know that people can't be fooled forever and he needs to get his act together to salvage his image.

SANDEEP SHAH, via email

It's Blind Faith over Rationality

In this age of modernisation, blind faith has trounced rationality in

India (Radha on the Trance Floor, August 31). How else does one explain the faith people repose in men and women who claim to have supernatural powers, but are wolves in sheep's skin? It seems that the biggest blow to Hinduism has been inflicted not by outside forces of infidels, but from within, by some of its so-called spiritual gurus.

J. AKSHAY, Bengaluru

Losers All

It is difficult to assess who lost more for there were only losers in this monsoon session of Parliament (House of Uncommons, August 31). The BJP and Congress have again showed the vacuous sterility of the current Indian political discourse. It is foolish for the parties to believe that loud vulgar behaviour can hold people's attention. If Jawaharlal Nehru set the standards of parliamentary propriety, then Feroze Gandhi fought for unfettered speech. Rahul Gandhi ensured both legacies were denigrated.

J. AKSHOBHYA, Mysuru

A Superior Star

What Nawazuddin Siddiqui lacks in looks, he more than compensates through his extraordinary range of his craft (Mean Street Star, August 31). He is a star who is here to



Don't Sit on OROP

The government probably took the One Rank, One Pension demand lightly and didn't think that ex-service men will take to the streets to protest against the delay in its implementation (Modi to Walk OROP Talk, August 31). It is sad that honourable people were forced by the government to get into a confrontational mode. The armed forces are an apolitical entity and the government should not politicise the issue, instead it should uphold the prestige of ex-service personnel.

LT COL RANJIT SINHA (RTD),
Kolkata

The procrastination of a long-pending genuine demand does not augur well for the nation after the sacrifices made by the ex-servicemen to protect our country from external and internal attacks. It is time Narendra Modi steps in to work out a way to honour his commitment, keeping in mind long-term interests of the nation and well-being of forces.

K.R. SRINIVASAN,
Secunderabad

stay. He is a thinking actor and puts in extra effort to make his character stand out even in the presence of superstars such as Salman Khan. I am sure he'll have countless fans like Kirti Nigam in the days to come.

BAL GOVIND, Noida

Unjust Demand

Reservations were envisaged as a social justice mechanism to mitigate the effect of centuries-old caste-based discrimination (Anandiben's Patel Pain, August 31). But the demand for reservation by Gujarat's politically and economically dominant Patidar community, spearheaded by 22-year-old Hardik Patel, has reduced the idea of affirmative action to farce. The Patidars can have no legitimate claims to represent themselves as a disadvantaged group for they dominate the state's diamond and textile industries.

P. ARIHANTH, Secunderabad

It is sad that the land of Sardar Patel and Mahatma Gandhi is caught in mindless violence for the most-absurd demand. The Patidars are an affluent community, not just in Gujarat but across the country and world. Reservation is meant for the underprivileged, not for the well-to-do.

MAHESH KAPASI, Delhi

THE SATANIC VERSES

"It's political football"

Angry and hurt, Salman Rushdie spoke to Principal Correspondent Madhu Jain. Excerpts:

Q. What will you do about the ban?

A. I've written an open letter to Rajiv telling him it's sad if the Ministry of Finance decides what books are to be read. If he makes a reversal, I would be the first to applaud him. If he doesn't, it's clear this is in line with other kinds of repression taking place.



Q. Is being read in India important to you?

A. Parts of *The Satanic Verses* have to do with my adult relationship with India. I'm very disappointed that the book isn't going to be read there because the Indian reader would have been able to appreciate it more than anyone else...

Q. Did you expect such a reaction?

A. Not of this force. A journalist asks me if I had portrayed god as a bald man with dandruff.

Q. Will you come to India?

A. I see no reason for going where my book is banned. I resent my book being used as political football.

Q. Isn't the book personal?

A. It's primarily comic in tone and is the most personal thing I've written. I'll never write about India again.



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A BERTH FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

The recent demand by the Patidars of Gujarat for inclusion in the list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) has surprised many. Their massive turnout at a rally in Ahmedabad on August 25 under the leadership of a young man, barely 22 years old, and the violence that followed, are not only unexpected but also hard to understand. There are many things that Indian political analysts have found perplexing in what is unfolding in Gujarat.

First and foremost, Gujarat is the state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi where he has been an uncontested leader for more than a decade. Although he does not belong to the Patidar community, in the recent past, the Patidars have been among his most loyal and active supporters. Modi also treated them well. During his tenure, they enjoyed a fair share of power in regional politics. When Modi took office in Delhi, he chose a member of the Patidar caste, Anandiben Patel, as his successor. Patidars have also been prominent in past alliances that ruled the state.

However, unlike in other regionally dominant caste communities, such as the Jats of Punjab and Haryana or the Reddys and Vokkaligas in South India, the economic and political might of Patidars did not emanate from their overwhelming presence in the rural and agrarian spheres alone. They have for long been well-invested in the urban economy. They were perhaps the first agrarian caste community to diversify and a section of them moved out of the village to establish themselves in the urban economy of the region and beyond. Much of the Gujarati diaspora in the West is made of Patidars.

Further, the agitation also seems to be questioning a larger assumption about the presumed change in Indian politics. One of the much talked-about inferences of the last Lok Sabha election was the declining significance of caste as a mobilising identity in electoral politics. Although he openly claimed to be a member of a “backward caste” community, Modi’s ascendancy was interpreted as a conclusive sign of the decline of the politics of caste, particularly of the kind that articulated itself around categories such as the OBCs, quotas and social justice after the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report during the early 1990s.

Modi’s success was also an indication of the growing redundancy of state-centric models of development. Although the reservation policy was not to be withdrawn, it seemed to be becoming increasingly irrelevant because in his model, the promised site

of India’s economic dynamism was to be located in the private and corporate sector, and not in an expansion of the state sector. The end of the Planning Commission was also an end of the Nehruvian model of development, which had promoted the public sector and expanded the state sector during the first five decades of India’s independence.

How then could we possibly understand the sudden outburst of the Patidars?

One of the obvious questions that needs urgent revisiting is the popular assumption that a market-led model of economic development can take care of all economic and social problems of a country like India. While the old-style, bureaucratic, planned development is certainly not the answer, societies like India are far too complex to be left to the whims and fancies of the market.

Although Gujarat has for sometime been among the more vibrant states in economic terms, its track record in achieving positive change in the social sector has been far from satisfactory. Not only has its performance been relatively unsatisfactory on several crucial indicators of human development, its mobility patterns are also quite skewed. For example, unlike neighbouring Maharashtra and the equally vibrant Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, Gujaratis are hard to find in the emergent spheres of the post-liberalisation new middle class. Even when young Patidars are educated, the quality of their learning and skills does not find them respectable positions in the emerging corporate economy of the state.

Notwithstanding the urban elite and the middle-class Indian’s dislike of any mention of caste in discourses on development and nation building, the Patidar movement has once again reminded us of the urgent need to under-

stand its dynamics in contemporary India. Caste will not go away simply because the middle-class urban Indian wishes so. Caste is not simply about traditional ritual status and hierarchy. It has shaped and continues to shape regimes of opportunities. The ground realities of caste are constantly changing and evolving. This has implications on the way we have so far approached the question of reservations. We need to look at it from the perspective with which it was visualised, as a means of giving space and representation to those who could not have been able to do it on their own, and not a source of mobility for those who can bully the system.



Even when young Patidars are educated, the quality of their learning fails to find them respectable positions in the emerging economy of Gujarat.

Surinder S. Jodhka is professor of sociology at JNU and affiliate senior fellow at Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities, Delhi

ZAPPED BY PATEL RAP

BJP President Amit Shah is furious over the party's failure to gauge the pulse of the Patel community, which formed the bedrock of the BJP's support base in Gujarat. The Patel reservation campaign led by Hardik Patel had been brewing since July before it erupted into statewide violence on August 25. Although it comes a bit late in the day, the BJP is now trying to hunt down the real culprit even as Hardik is reaching out to other backward communities such as the Gujjars and Kurmis. But so far they just have conspiracy theories—while some say VHP leader Pravin Togadia is getting back at Modi through Hardik, many others think it is Modi's bête noire Keshubhai Patel. Some insiders say it could even be the handiwork of a key political figure who was part of Modi's 2014 Lok Sabha election campaign. Their guess is as good as anyone else's.

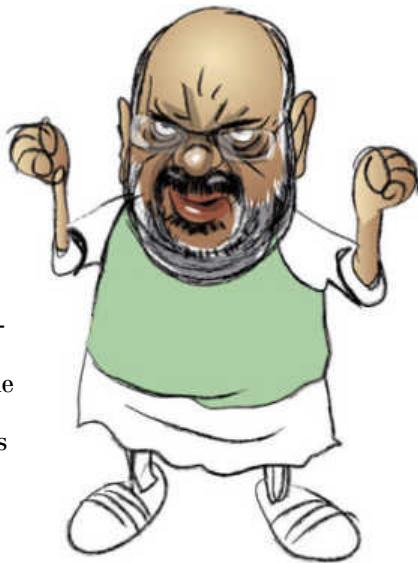


Illustration by SAURABH SINGH



PRESIDENT'S RULE

Last year BJP President Amit Shah tried to learn and speak Bengali when he announced Mission Bengal 2016 (assembly election in the state is due in 2016). Now, BJP's only woman national general secretary and party in-charge of Maharashtra, **Saroj Pandey**, has decided

to take a leaf out of Shah's book. She has decided to learn Marathi and is often seen carrying a Class I textbook to learn the basics of the language.

WIKI-LEAKING, PUNJABI STYLE

Less than a month after checking out food-processing enterprises in Poland and Hungary, Punjab's itchy-footed deputy CM **Sukhbir Badal** is off again. It is South Korea this time where, besides exploring business opportunities, he also hopes to renew historic ties between Seoul and 'sadda' Punjab. Ahead of the trip this week, Badal's overzealous media managers dug up "an Indian princess who married a Korean prince thousands of years ago". The vignette from Wikipedia was promptly edited and issued as a press note, emphasising the special ties between Koreans and Punjabis.



AWAY AND BACK

PDP President **Mehbooba Mufti** is back on the political scene—addressing party workers and listing the coalition government's accomplishments. She had been keeping a low profile ever since the PDP-BJP government came to power in March that led to speculations that she was unhappy with her father and J&K CM Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's style of functioning. The flurry of political activity has now added grist to the rumour mill that she is going to replace her father as CM. Sayeed is in poor health, she told party workers at a recent meeting.

THREE CHAIRS

Three Rajasthan-cadre IAS officers now making waves on Raisina Hill



RAJIV MEHRISHI Home secretary

Named for the post on August 31, the day of his retirement. The former state chief secretary moved to Delhi as finance secretary in 2014 and is said to be close to Arun Jaitley.



SUNIL ARORA I&B secretary

The former CMD of Indian Airlines, and secretary to the then CM B.S. Shekhawat and principal secretary to CM Raje in her first term, was earlier secretary, Livelihood Mission.



VINOD ZUTSHI Tourism secretary

The former deputy election commissioner is not new to tourism. He has earlier served as Rajasthan tourism secretary and chairman of state tourism development corporation.

GATEWAY GETAWAY

Telangana CM K. Chandrasekhar Rao

Rao is determined to create a lasting impression for visitors to Hyderabad. The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) is set to build nine welcome gateways—on the highways and the road from the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport leading into the city—with special landscaping, including fountains and lighting. The Gateways of Hyderabad project, as GHMC mandarins call it, will cost a whopping Rs 10 crore.





AAM GOING OUT OF SEASON

Actionalism has weakened the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab much to the delight of the SAD and the BJP. The August 29 suspension of two of the four Lok Sabha AAP MPs, Dharavir Gandhi and Harinder Singh Khalsa, has added to the party's woes in Punjab. Turns out it was their proximity to **Yogendra Yadav** that proved to be the main reason behind their suspension.

GUESSING GAME



Former PM **H.D. Deve Gowda** is back playing the kingmaker. Both the Congress and the BJP badly need the support of the 14 councilors of Gowda's Janata Dal (Secular) to elect the mayor of Bengaluru. Gowda confused his opponents, first by indicating he would align with the Congress. But when Union minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda met him with a special message from PM Modi, he packed off his councillors to an undisclosed location in Kerala. Both parties are waiting for the final verdict.

FREE FOR ALL

by Sandeep Adhwaryu



TOO MANY MONKEYS
ON YOUR BACK, SIR!
...HIGH TIME FOR
MONKEY BAAT

SMART MOVE

The Modi government has shortlisted 13 cities of Uttar Pradesh as part of the smart city project. This has spurred CM Akhilesh Yadav to fast-track his project to develop six hi-tech cities, each costing over Rs 1,000 crore. Three of them are Trans-Ganga in Kanpur, Naini in Allahabad and Chola in Bulandshahar. On September 2, the CM is scheduled to lay the foundation stone for Naini, a proposed city spread over 1,115 acres with an engineering college, medical college, IT park, electronic city, automobile city, underground wiring and 24-hour power supply.



COP IN DOCK

The Haryana government on August 28 launched all-woman police stations across 21 districts to help women report crime incidents fearlessly. Interestingly, the first case was filed against a sub-inspector in Sirsa for alleged sexual harassment. His colleagues tried to save him but the department was compelled to suspend him after the matter reached police higher-ups.

THE WEEK IN CRIME OBJECTS

SHOES

Eleven policemen from Delhi and UP were suspended for going on a shoe-shopping spree with an arrested carjacker.



SUITCASE

Mumbai police recovered a suitcase from Indrani Mukerjea's residence. Her son Mikhail Bora alleged Indrani meant to murder him and pack his body off in the suitcase.



HYPODERMIC NEEDLE

The police in Andhra Pradesh's West Godavari district are on the lookout for a masked, bike-borne psychopath who has attacked 11 women with a needle.



MOVING HOME

Andhra Pradesh CM **N. Chandrababu Naidu** is leading from the front in moving officials from Hyderabad to the vicinity of the proposed capital Amaravati. On August 29, he and his wife observed 'housewarming' rituals before moving into his palatial residence. Ironically, it is among 65 riverbed structures identified by the revenue authorities for flouting building regulations.





GUJARAT'S LIKE BIHAR



... when it comes to caste politics

THE 14% SWING CASTE



BIHAR
Yadavs are the single largest caste group—14% of the population

GUJARAT
Patels constitute roughly 14% of the state's population

CASTE GROUPINGS



BIHAR
Mahadalits & Muslim-Yadav combos were political creations

GUJARAT
KHAM (Kshatriya, Harijans, Adivasis & Muslims) and **Paksh** (Patel & Kshatriya) are caste combinations

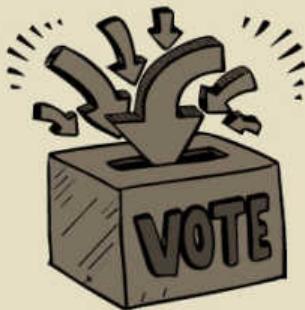
QUOTAVIOLENCE



BIHAR
Anti-reservation protests during the Mandal Commission (1990s) had turned violent

GUJARAT
Protests against/for reservation resulted in violence in 1980, 1985 and 2015

THE SWINGS



BIHAR
Lalu Yadav rode on the Yadav vote bank to become CM

GUJARAT
BJP gained when Patels switched loyalties from Congress in the 1990s

REPRESENTATION



BIHAR
The scales are slowly turning in favour of the OBCs from upper castes

GUJARAT
Patels have a disproportionately high representation in the state government

BIHAR-GUJARAT POLITICS

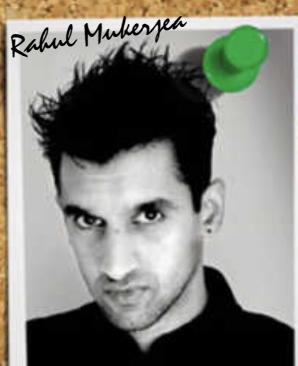
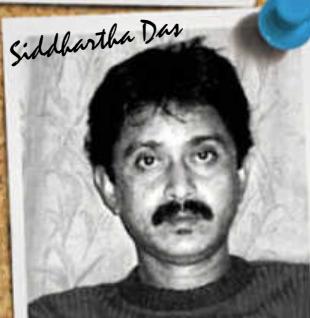
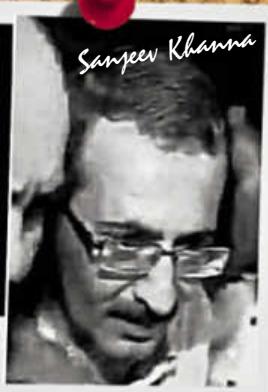
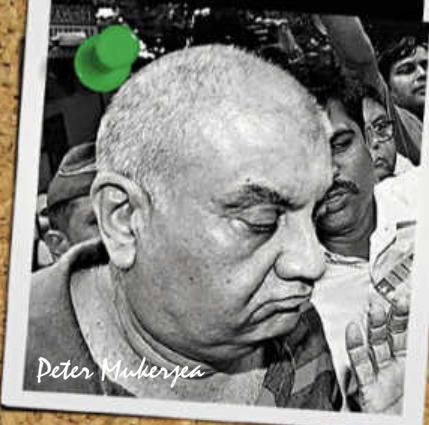


Nitish Kumar
supports demand for reservation by Patels in Gujarat



Amit Shah
claims in Bihar that his party gave India its first OBC prime minister

However, unlike Bihar, Gujarat is probably the first state that has said no to a demand for reservation



LIFE, LOVES AND LIES OF INDRANI

The bizarre narrative of a woman who has the nation transfixed, from the small-town Indrani Bora of Guwahati to the reinvented Indrani Khanna of Kolkata to the glamorous Mrs Peter Mukerjea in Mumbai and now the prime suspect in her daughter's murder

By Kunal Pradhan with Kaushik Deka in Guwahati,
Damayanti Datta in Kolkata and Gayatri Jayaraman in Mumbai

In a rainy afternoon in Mumbai in August 2007, with the half-constructed Bandra-Worli Sea Link looming in the distance, an unsuspecting new colleague was ushered for an audience with Indrani Mukerjea in an office that served as the temporary headquarters of her soon-to-be-launched television empire. Without greeting or preamble, Indrani smiled at her new colleague and said: "Imagine there is a meadow with a hundred sheep on it. Now imagine that 99 of those sheep are looking in one direction, and one sheep is looking in another. Do you know who that one sheep is?" The bemused new colleague professed that he didn't. "That sheep," declared Indrani, "is INX!"

This was Indrani Mukerjea, then 39 years old, in her avatar as a wannabe media baroness who, she imagined, would one day be as powerful as Rupert Murdoch. Until then, she had already been through several transformative makeovers in various phases of her eventful life. She'd played the role of a pampered child growing up in a middle-class Guwahati locality. Of a girl who left home early and dashed into an all-too-hasty relationship. Of a woman who fled that relationship, after bearing two children, to embrace the glitz and

TWIST OF FATE



1968

Born in Guwahati to Upendra Kumar Bora and Durga Rani Bora.



1983

Clears Class X board examination from St Mary's, Guwahati, scores over 80 per cent in four subjects.

1984

Joins Cotton College, Guwahati, alma mater to the who's who of Assam. Meets Bishnu Chaudhury, then a law student. They date for a while.

1985

Shifts to Shillong midway through her inter and joins Lady Keane College

1986

Meets Siddhartha Das, a young executive, at a Shillong restaurant named Chirag. Returns to Guwahati with Siddhartha, who starts living in her Sundarpur house. Tells parents they're married.



glamour of Kolkata's famous club scene with a new husband. Of a suave, polished woman making another fresh start to run a successful head-hunting firm in Mumbai. And eventually, as Peter Mukerjea's wife, of the first lady of Indian television who was still seeking her own individual space. Indrani's life was indeed an epic saga—part-Margaret Mitchell, part-John Steinbeck, part-Danielle Steel, until a grisly murder has now given it a macabre, *sui generis* Roald Dahl twist. Told like a grubby Madhur Bhandarkar potboiler.

Indrani today stands accused of brutally killing her daughter, Sheena Bora, whom she had passed off to Mumbai's high society as her half-sister. She allegedly committed the crime in collusion with her estranged ex-husband Sanjeev Khanna, a member of Kolkata's swish set, and her driver Shyam Rai, who later bragged about the crime to a friend in a Mumbai bar. The three had allegedly abducted Sheena on April 24, 2012, strangled later, and then burnt and dumped her body. Indrani's arrest this August 25 and details of her hitherto-unexplored

life have set into motion a series of revelations about her past that have both intrigued and disturbed India. Indrani, her face covered with a black cloth as she is ushered to court by policemen amidst a frenzy of TV journalists, now finds herself in the discomfiting glare of a nation that is unable to look away. She is a figure of universal derision—a bit like Walter Palmer, the dentist from Minnesota who has been accused of beheading Celil the lion in a Zimbabwe forest reserve in July, and a bit like the scheming, despised vamp from the family soap operas she once commissioned as the programming head of general entertainment channel 9X.

But even as the police close in on preparing a chargesheet, led by Mumbai Police's media-savvy Commissioner Rakesh Maria himself, it's been hard to distinguish fact from fiction in Indrani's carefully constructed, but brittle life story that has now been shattered into a million pieces.

The police and media circus is still throwing up more questions than it is answering. The motive, the modus operandi, the sudden reconciliation of Indrani and Khanna, are all unclear. Is

this a debauched family squabble? Is it all about money, as top investigators have suggested to **INDIA TODAY**? Why did Sheena have to lose her life? And, perhaps the most unsettling question of all, did a mother really sever the most umbilical of bonds to murder her daughter in cold blood? To comprehend this most sordid of modern-day fables, one must first attempt to decipher who Indrani really is by charting the astonishing journey that she has traversed.

GROWING PAINS

INDRANI
BORA
Guwahati
1968-1990



Indrani's story begins in 1968 in a dusty colony in Guwahati. Sundarpur, literally "a place of beauty", wasn't always the posh locality it is today. Once in the news for flash floods and roads with potholes the size of bathtubs, the area has recently gone through a 'gentrification', as if in anticipation



1987

Indrani's father tries to help Siddhartha by opening a restaurant for him, but it doesn't take off.

Daughter Sheena is born. She's named after the chief protagonist of the 1984 Hollywood film, *Sheena*.



1988

Mikhail is born. Reportedly named after Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

1990

In June, Indrani moves to Kolkata, saying she wants to study further. Siddhartha is evicted from the Guwahati house soon after.

1993

Submits an affidavit in court giving the custody of her two children to her mother; claims they were born in 1989 and 1990.

Marries Sanjeev Khanna, a regular at the prestigious CCFC club, after a brief romance.

Moves from her PG accommodation to Khanna's house in Hastings in Alipore and becomes a regular on the club scene.



of the national attention it was about to receive.

Its concrete roads are now smooth, and most houses boast of unusually large compounds, with lush gardens and fleets of cars parked in driveways. Here, House No. 8 always stood out—not for its size, its design, or the cars parked outside, but for its heavily padlocked windows and for a distinctive spiral staircase that led directly to one of the bedrooms on the first floor. This is the house where Indrani Bora, known back then by her “*ghoruwa naam*” (nickname) Pori, lived with her parents, Upendra Kumar Bora and Durga Rani Bora. Six hefty young men, all regulars at a local gym, guard the house round-the-clock these days—to keep prying reporters and inquisitive onlookers at an arm’s length. It is said that Durga Rani is not keeping well, and must not be aggravated further.

With the Boras out of commission, people in their locality are having a field day offering different versions and myriad impressions of the family to anyone armed with a TV camera, or even a notebook. Neighbours today describe them as “reserved”



and “reluctant to mingle with others”. According to Jibon Bordoloi, who lives down the road, they would rarely attend weddings or any other ceremonies in the locality. But no one seems to know for sure what Upendra Bora did for a living. His brother Manik,

who lives a four-hour drive away in Tezpur, Assam’s cultural capital, says Upendra was a contractor. “He also rented out some of his properties,” Manik tells INDIA TODAY, adding that Upendra still earns “about Rs 27,500” as monthly rent, which, he stresses, is a fair amount given the going rate for rentals in the city. Part of the ground floor is leased to a private firm while two families and some working men stay in what were once the Boras’ servants’ quarters.

A 31-year-old man, who asks not to be named, claims that Upendra once worked as a manager in his father’s paint factory, but was sacked because of a dispute over money. People also remember that the Boras once ran a guesthouse in Guwahati called Chanakya Inn, which, according to a local newspaper, was raided by the Dispur police in 2000 over allegations that rooms were being rented out on an hourly basis for sleazy liaisons. When INDIA TODAY checked records in Dispur police station, however, no such case was found to be registered. Another example of wild, unsubstantiated rumours flying thick and fast, as



TWIST OF FATE

1996

Starts HR firm INX Services in Kolkata with an office near Park Street Post Office.

1997

Daughter Vidhie is born.

2000

Indrani and Sanjeev start drifting, and then falling apart.

2001

Meets ad and theatre personality Alyque Padamsee, who is impressed by her and urges her to move to Mumbai.

2002

Moves with Vidhie to Mumbai, where Padamsee becomes her step-up into the city's high society. Meets Star TV CEO Peter Mukerjea at a party hosted by Suhel Seth. The two start dating soon after.

Divorces Khanna and marries Mukerjea. Is now first lady of the television entertainment industry.



neighbours, colleagues, even relatives, stretch the limits of reality to align their versions of Indrani with the demonised figure they now see on TV.

By all accounts, the Boras led a comfortable middle-class life. Manik claims his brother is close to 90, but electoral records suggest that Upendra is now 78 and his wife Durga Rani 73. The Boras sent their only daughter, Indrani, to St Mary's, Guwahati, one of the most prestigious girls' schools in the state. One neighbour suggests that Indrani had eloped with a man from Nepal when she was in the ninth standard, and was rusticated from school. The school records, however, tell a different story. Indrani was, in fact, a bright student, scoring over 80 per cent when she cleared her Class X board examination in 1983. Her classmates remember her as a "brat" who always managed to do well in studies.

After Class X, Indrani joined Guwahati's Cotton College, alma mater of the who's who in Assam, including musician Bhupen Hazarika and former chief minister Sarat Chandra Sinha. It was at Cotton College that Indrani, still in her teens, met Bishnu

Chaudhury, a law student who was the son of a well-known Guwahati-based doctor, B.L. Chaudhury. There are some suggestions from former classmates that the two were married briefly, but Chaudhury says that though they were in a relationship, they never tied the knot.

Indrani moved to Shillong's Lady

Keane College midway through her intermediate studies and finished her Class XII board examinations in 1985. Here, she would often frequent a popular restaurant, Chirag, where she met Siddhartha Das, then a dashing young man who used work in a private firm. A far cry from the Das who was seen on TV on September 1, face covered with a handkerchief, offering details of their time together. It appears that Siddhartha's wife, Babli, had no idea about his links with Indrani until the media came knocking. By 1986, Indrani had told her family that Siddhartha was her husband, and had brought him to live in Sundarpur with her parents. This month, almost three decades later, Siddhartha has said that they were not married then.

Indrani's father tried to help Siddhartha settle down by opening a restaurant for him in Ganeshguri, but the venture never really took off. A jobless partner was not Indrani's idea of marital life. The responsibility of two children—Sheena, born in 1987, and Mikhail, born in 1988—added to the tension between the two. So in June



**IN 1992, WHEN
SHEENA WAS TO BE
ADMITTED TO SCHOOL,
THE BORAS DECIDED
THAT HER GRAND-
PARENTS WOULD BE THE
LEGAL GUARDIANS OF
THE TWO CHILDREN.**



2003

Gets a letter from her parents, asking for financial support to raise Sheena and Mikhail. Agrees to help.

Peter officially adopts Vidhie and raises her as his own daughter.

Her HR firm grows by leaps and bounds in the media industry, acquiring big clients.

2006

Brings Sheena with her to Mumbai and enrolls her in St Xavier's College. Mikhail moves to Pune to complete his education.



2007

Starts INX Media with Peter. They raise funds and rope in Vir Sanghvi as the face of their proposed news channel.

2008

The Wall Street Journal names Indrani as one of the 50 global women CEOs to watch out for.

Entertainment channel 9X's ratings plummet. The Mukerjeas have a falling out with Sanghvi, leading to him and several others walking out.



1990, Indrani moved to Kolkata, saying she wanted to complete her education. Within three days, Siddhartha was evicted from her Guwahati home.

In 1992, when Sheena was to be admitted to school, the Boras decided that her grandparents would be the legal guardians of the two children. The following year, Indrani submitted an affidavit in the Kamrup judicial magistrate's court handing over custody of the two children to her mother. But the birth years of both children were changed. In the affidavit, Indrani claims she lost touch with Siddhartha in 1989 and Mikhail was born in 1990. With Siddhartha out of the picture and Indrani in Kolkata, the Boras raised Sheena and Mikhail as their own.

Sheena was enrolled in Disneyland School, now renamed Sudarshan Public School, in Guwahati's Khanapara locality. Quiet and unassuming, she finished Class X with over 80 per cent marks, and her Class XII board from Faculty Higher Secondary School as a humanities student. Mikhail, not quite as smart in classwork, dropped out of Disneyland in the ninth standard, and finished his Class X boards

as a private student. The Boras' main source of income at this time was their guesthouse Chanakya Inn. When it finally went under in 2000, they began struggling to make ends meet. Over this period, Upendra, Durga Rani, and their two adopted children seemingly lost all touch with Indrani—at least for now.

THE TRANSFORMATION

INDRANI
KHANNA
Kolkata
1990-2001



It was in Kolkata, as a young woman free of family encumbrances, that Indrani first reinvented herself. A sprightly 22-year-old, who first rolled into town as Indrani Das, she is remembered by partyphiles as a charming roisterer, and by corporate bigwigs as the exotic Assam beauty who knocked on every corporate door, always draped in chiffon saris—black, red or yellow—in search of business for her small-time HR consultancy,

INX Services.

It hadn't taken too long for Indrani to don her new air-kissing avatar. Although she lived in a modest PG accommodation after arriving in the city, she got access to the upmarket neighbourhood of Hastings in Alipore after a brief romance and swift wedding with Khanna in 1993. The Kolkata clubland believes that Khanna, a regular on the manicured grounds of the Calcutta Cricket & Football Club (CCFC)—India's oldest sporting club and one of Indrani's favourite playing fields in the city for 10 years—played Pygmalion to her. "He was a jovial fellow, friendly, spoke to seniors with respect, came from a good background and a good school," says a CCFC committee member. "Although he was not into the key activities of the club, say, hockey, football, cricket or rugby, he was a motor rally enthusiast. And he knew a lot of people." On the flip side, he loved his drink, sometimes got into brawls, got suspended from the club for a while, and defaulted on payments time and again. He suffered from a "damsel-in-distress syndrome", say his friends,

TWIST OF FATE



2008

An enquiry is ordered by the government into the financial dealings of INX Media but it never really takes off.

2009

The Mukerjeas sell their stake in INX Media. A government probe later finds evidence of financial impropriety in the transaction.

2010

Peter's son Rahul returns to Mumbai from London. He and Sheena start dating, leading to acrimony in the family.

2011

Peter and Indrani move to Bristol, where Vidhie is studying, and occasionally return to their Mumbai flat.

2012

Sheena gets a job in Mumbai Metro One, a part of the Reliance ADAG Group. Sheena is allegedly killed on April 24 by Indrani, her ex-husband Khanna, and driver Shyam Rai. The body is allegedly dumped in Raigad.

Rahul goes to Khar police station, saying Sheena is missing, but no FIR is filed. Indrani tells him she's moved to the US.



and was besotted by Indrani. Their daughter, Vidhie, was born in 1997.

An HR consultant, who used to work with leading recruitment agency ABC Consultants, remembers Indrani as someone who often approached them for placement services with INX, which she set up around 1996. "Her office was somewhere near Park Street Post Office and she would walk over to our office regularly," she says. "She was trying to cater to restaurants, small hotels and events outfits, basically placing girls fresh out of college." Over the years, her network started to grow.

But it was possibly T.P. Roy, Ronnie to his friends, former owner of tea plantations in the Dooars, north Bengal, who gave Indrani access to the dyed-in-the-tweed upper crust of Kolkata. Roy was an active member of clubs across the city, until he was struck by paralysis a few years ago—members of Tolly Club still remember the garrulous old man nursing his drinks, with a nurse in tow. Roy belonged to one of those old money families that have historically exuded a larger-than-life image in the city: for the early fortunes


**IN KOLKATA, INDRANI IS
REMEMBERED BY
PARTYPHILES AS A
CHARMING ROISTERER,
AND BY CORPORATE
BIGWIGS AS THE EXOTIC
ASSAM BEAUTY WHO
KNOCKED ON EVERY
CORPORATE DOOR.**
.....

their ancestors made, for their love of art, and for the privileges they have always enjoyed. "They don't have that sort of money anymore," says someone who knew Roy and his family. "But doors open for them socially. Indrani

was close to him and, through him, got access to those exclusive echelons of an ultra-snob society that wouldn't have opened for her otherwise," says a veteran club man.

"She was never a kitty-party person," says another HR consultant. "Her favourite hunting ground was corporate offices, the CCFC, the gatherings of rich Marwari girls, mostly old students of schools such as Queen of the Missions and Calcutta Girls, and the IAS wives' circuits." It probably helped Indrani climb the ladder through the changing profile of the city. As expat British chef and restaurant consultant, Shaun Kenworthy, says: "Kolkata is all about history and heritage. But now a whole lot of cool, smart Marwaris are giving the city a new sort of buzz. And that's the game changer for the city." Kenworthy, who joined the Park Hotel as executive chef 14 years ago, has unveiled the swanky 1658 Bar and Kitchen recently. He had never met Indrani but thought of Khanna, who helped launch 1658, as "a genuinely nice bloke".

Indrani in Kolkata is a kaleidoscope of impressions, and a litany of



2015

The Mumbai police get an anonymous call from Meerut saying Sheena has been missing for three years. Investigation begins.

Shyam Rai is arrested in an illegal arms case on August 21. He allegedly confesses his role in the Sheena murder.

A body found in Raigad in 2012 is exhumed. On August 25, Indrani is arrested by plainclothes cops while visiting an orphanage.

Her ex-husband Sanjeev Khanna is also picked up by the police on August 26 in Kolkata.

Mumbai Police chief takes charge of the case and starts sitting in on interrogations.

Indrani denies any role in Sheena's killing, insists she is in the US. Peter, Mikhail, Rahul among those questioned by the police.

Sheena's father Siddhartha surfaces. Says he and Indrani were never married. The plot thickens, as police work on preparing a chargesheet.



contradictions: from sweet to manipulating, polite to aggressive, vivacious to vengeful. According to a senior HR executive, she was "mindlessly ambitious". Yet others "never sensed anything like that in her".

Indrani and Khanna slowly drifted, and then fell apart. Soon, she was gone. The last Kolkata remembers of her is a phone call that everyone who was anyone had received from Mumbai in 2002. "You know what? I was Indrani Das. I was Indrani Khanna. And now I'm going to be Indrani Mukerjea. And Peter has bought me this amazing red Mercedes!" The small-town girl from Assam had won by hard conquest the right to reinvention: from the abyss of being nobody to the pinnacle of being somebody.

Juicy gossip rippled through the CCFC. In between drinks and laughter, people huddled discreetly in corridors and walked to balconies to chat: "She did what?" Just one solitary figure in the main bar, drowning dangerous amounts of Jack Daniel's and throwing darts at a board, seemed oblivious to it all: "Poor Sanju," they all said.

THE FIRST LADY

INDRANI
MUKERJEA
Mumbai
2001-2012



Indrani's move to Mumbai was fortuitous. Advertising and theatre maven Alyque Padamsee would frequent Kolkata to meet with clients, says wife Sharon Prabhakar, and he often encountered Indrani there. She was a party-perennial who had bagged a staffing contract with Reliance through her HR company. She was going through a troubled marriage and had dreams of making it big.

Padamsee says he nudged the petite, polite, put-together professional to move to Mumbai. When she did, in 2001, he became her step up to the social circuit. Most advertising professionals today recall first meeting Indrani with Padamsee, then quite at the peak of his branding career. He presented her as his chic 'plus-one' at a party hosted by Suhel Seth at The Library Bar of the Taj President

in 2002, and Star TV CEO Peter Mukerjea, there with a girlfriend, was interested enough to drop her home.

On day two, she walked into Peter's office to ask for a recruitment assignment. By day three, they were dating. And by day four, Peter had fallen for her signature North-eastern mutton curry. With Peter firmly by her side, Indrani set her focus on the media and began to acquire big clients—the Times Group, HT Media, Percept Picture Company, BIG FM, WorldSpace Satellite Radio and FedEx, to name just a few. A month into their romance, she had moved in with Peter. Three months later, they were married at their marble-floored Pochkhanwala Road home, with singer couple Sonali and Roop Kumar Rathod and senior customs officer Neerja Shah for neighbours.

The newlyweds soon came to be known as one of those "get-a-room" couples who couldn't stay away from each other. At a dinner hosted at socialite Farzana Contractor's Malabar Hill home in 2002, a few weeks into the young flush of their love, Indrani and Peter famously interlocked their hands under the table and, unwilling

to be parted, ate dinner—one with the right hand, the other with the left. Friends laughed at Peter's newfound adolescence. But the story goes that Indrani managed to offend actor Simi Garewal at a party with a few ill-timed remarks early into her Mumbai initiation. Another friend, who once saw her correcting a CEO on how to hold his wine glass, said she soon earned many “polite enemies”.

It was in Mumbai that the fantasist in Indrani first began to take flight. She constructed a whole new back story for herself—as corroborated by senior journalist Vir Sanghvi, with whom she worked during the planning of INX Media's NewsX channel. Indrani told her newly acquired friends that her father had died when she was a child, and that her mother had married the father's brother. According to Indrani, her stepfather had molested her, and she'd fled to Kolkata at a young age. She also claimed that her ex-husband Sanjeev was “vile” and “abusive”, and that she had left for Mumbai with their daughter Vidhie, who was later adopted by Peter.

Home after home in Bombay's high society opened their doors to the Mukerjeas, more out of a connect with Peter than his wife, whom they didn't really know, and who, as TV executive Ravina Raj Kohli says, “was often discussed behind champagne glasses”. Indrani was too clearly receiving a step-up to be fully accepted. “She was too nice,” says one industry magnate's wife, “so nice that you couldn't believe it after a while. She would look into your eyes too much when she spoke, and flutter her eyelashes, and call you ‘babe’. Nobody is that nice.” As socialite and former Miss India Queenie Singh puts it: “She was never a part of Bombay society. She was too much of an outsider. Bombay society would not accept her, so she was creating a society that was clearly all in her head.”

But a lot of these comments, including the accusation of “crazy eyes” that most of high society today avers they once saw in Indrani, spring from wanting to dissociate with someone

accused of murder. By all accounts, Indrani and Peter were a unit and she made herself a roaring success in the city—he played golf and tinkered with cars, she placed top CEOs and cooked her famous mutton curry. “Mumbai society lies prostrate before success. In front of success, all is forgiven,” says former Times Group CEO Pradeep Guha, the inventor of Page 3. “And like it or not, she was successful.”

In 2002, when news of Indrani's providential new marriage filtered to Guwahati, her parents wrote to her, for the first time in almost a decade. They said they were struggling financially, and could not take care of the children any longer. They urged Indrani to do right by them and send home a stipend. Indrani, although incensed by a letter that may have exposed her past to Peter, agreed to help.

Neighbours in Assam say the Bora

house was transformed overnight. Interior decorators were summoned, and two new cars were bought. Indrani went to Guwahati in 2006 and brought Sheena to Mumbai, as her half-sister. The Mukerjeas enrolled her at St Xavier's College, and Sheena, who got along famously with Vidhie, was often seen with them at social gatherings. Mikhail was moved to Pune to further his education. Peter's older son, Rahul, from his previous marriage with Shabnam Anand, never warmed up to Indrani but grew fond of Sheena almost immediately. The two even began dating later—an awkward link that led to much disharmony in the Mukerjea household.

It was in the middle of this complicated family dynamic that Peter and Indrani decided to launch INX Media in 2007, with Sanghvi as the credible face of NewsX, and Indrani taking over as programming head of 9X after the first incumbent, Dilip Ghosh, was removed months before launch.

Peter, known for transforming Indian television with shows such as *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, and mentoring a host of future channel heads, had been sidelined in 2006 after Star had been overtaken by Zee after six solid years. He had quit soon after.

The investors of his new venture INX, insiders say, were a curious mix. There was investment from some subsidiary companies owned by a top industrial house; from the Singapore-based Temasek Holdings; from New Silk Route, an entity that involved Rajat Gupta, the US-based businessman who was later convicted for insider trading; from another group called New Vernon Private Equity; and from Kotak Mahindra Capital.

Not long after the launch of 9X and music channel 9XM, however, it became clear that the network was not going to be the money spinner everyone thought it would be. That was a peculiar time in India's TV industry, not too dissimilar to the dot-com boom of the early 2000s. Sameer Nair, Peter's longtime colleague, had left Star to launch NDTV Imagine, and Viacom18 was investing heavily in their new venture Colors. All these networks were hoping to garner huge



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advertising revenues and high valuations. But the market was more saturated than they imagined, and of the three, only Colors eventually survived.

With 9X's ratings plummeting and NewsX still far from launch after a dispute over its distribution budgets, allegations of misappropriation of funds through inflated billing and hawala transactions began to surface. An inquiry was ordered by the government in 2008, but never really took off.

To put the numbers into perspective, insiders say that 9X had an annual programming budget in the region of Rs 350 crore, a distribution budget of Rs 150 crore, and a marketing budget of Rs 100 crore. Another inquiry, conducted not long after the sale of INX Media to Indi Media in 2009, by the corporate affairs ministry's Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) in 2013, revealed that there had been a wrongful gain of Rs 168.5 crore in what was described as a "sham transaction" carried out at that time. Although there are allegations that a lot of that money went to Peter and Indrani, who have been described as the "Bunty aur Babli" or the "Bonnie and Clyde" of the TV industry, there is no direct evidence yet that the money trail ends at them. Nor is there proof yet that they diverted funds from these deals to offshore accounts.

Once their connection with INX ended, the Mukerjeas retreated to the margins of Mumbai's high society, before extricating themselves altogether for greener pastures. They moved to Bristol, where Vidhie was studying. Sheena, meanwhile, joined Mumbai Metro One, a unit of Reliance ADAG, in 2011—a year before she would allegedly be killed.

THE ACCUSED

THE
**'PERFECT
MURDER'**



Indrani's still-rosy story took a dark turn earlier this year, when the Mumbai Police received an anonymous call from a yet-to-be-identified source in Meerut that Sheena, who

Indrani insisted had moved to the United States, was missing for more than three years. It was a tip-off that caught Maria's attention, and the subsequent arrest of Indrani's driver Shyam Rai, allegedly in an arms case on August 21, opened a Pandora's box that led to Indrani's arrest, and later that of her ex-husband Khanna, who had allegedly waltzed back into her life, out of the blue, for one morbid Last Tango.

The case has been taking a puzzling new turn every day. But apart from questions such as who is whose daughter, and who is seeing whom—which have added to the media frenzy surrounding the story—there are serious gaps still to be filled about more crucial issues, such as the motive, the modus operandi, and even the murderer itself.

The case for the prosecution will now depend on the rigour of police's forensic evidence, and a lot hinges on the DNA test report of the body that was exhumed in Raigad. For, as things stand, even the identity of the victim has not been proved. Given that Indrani's key defence is to maintain unflinchingly, even when confronted with Khanna and Rai, that Sheena is alive in the US, establishing the death will be a crucial first step. The DNA report will also determine if Indrani is indeed Sheena's mother. And it may, depending on the post-mortem and how clear the DNA evidence is after more than three years of decomposition, even reveal the manner of death.

The second key evidence will be the computer from which Sheena's fake resignation letter was allegedly sent after she had been killed, and Sheena's cell phone from which 11 text messages were sent to Rahul, asking him not to seek her out. Call records that place Khanna and Indrani in conversation 11 times on the day before the alleged murder, and the cell tower data that places them in Raigad after Sheena was killed, are also crucial to the prosecution. And so is Sheena's passport, recovered from Rahul's house in Dehradun, that militates against the theory of her living abroad.

The third element will be witness testimonies. Key witnesses include



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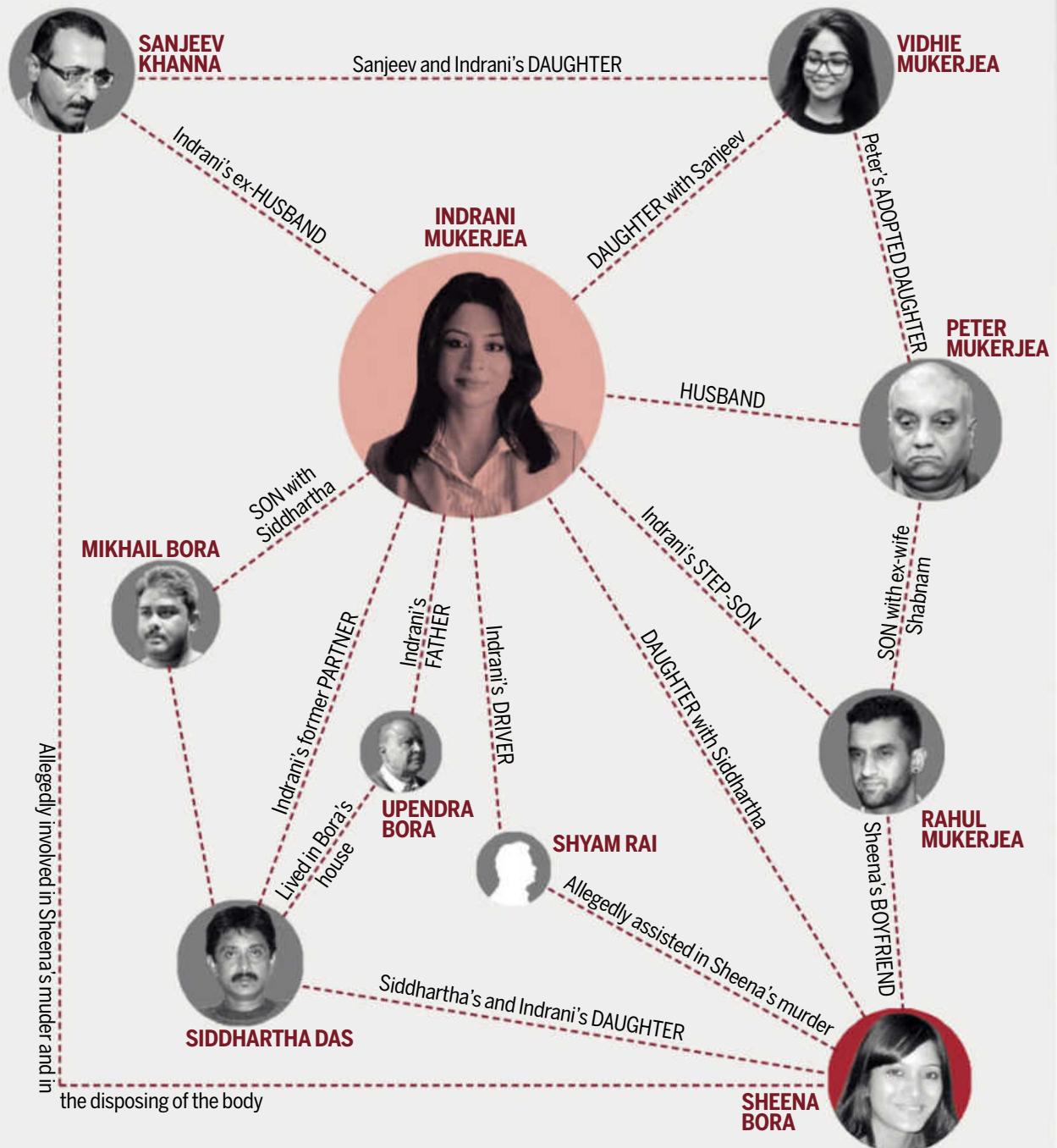
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WEB OF COMPLEXITY

How the cast of characters in the Indrani Mukerjea saga share multiple links, often going beyond simple family ties



Yakult

Rahul, who attempted to file a missing person's report at Khar police station; the driver, who is expected to turn approver; Peter, who will need to prove his ignorance of the alleged plot to kill Sheena; and Mikhail, who claims there was a plot being hatched to kill him as well. The police have been filling the gaps with testimonies from anyone or anything that can corroborate their circumstantial evidence. From shop attendants who sold the props used in the murder, the doctor who conducted the post-mortem, CCTV footage from Hotel Hiltop in Worli that would allegedly show Indrani and Khanna working in collusion, and the policemen who did not register an FIR when the unclaimed body was first discovered in Raigad in 2012.

W hickever way the case unfolds, police sources say that Indrani is an accused like only a few others. Held in the Santacruz police station lock-up for women, there is a steely, look-you-in-the-eye confidence about her. Not for one minute since the police began their interrogation has her gaze faltered. She is stiff and unyielding, strong, and insistent that she will only speak with her lawyers present. She had stuck to the story that Sheena was her sister until the police confronted her with Khanna. It was only then, say those who were in the room with her, did they see her falter, only to compose herself in the blink of an eye.

"She assumed that she had committed the perfect crime, except in our line of work, we know there is no such thing," thunders a top investigating officer working on the case. Another highly placed police source, says, searching for a motive, "It can only be money." How much? "Enough to make those who participated willing to kill for it, that's how much!"

But the gulf between fact, fiction and theory is yet to be bridged, even as the police and sections of the media seem to have entered an odd race with each other to propound hypotheses and find witnesses. It was the press, for example, that found Mikhail in Guwahati and Siddhartha



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Das in Kolkata before the police could trace them. And it's the police that are playing to the galleries by parading the accused from police station to police station, in full public view of the cameras, almost on a daily basis, to conduct their interrogations at Khar. In the middle of this all, Rakesh Maria dramatically arrives from the police headquarters in Crawford Market in a white SUV, getting off in the middle of the information-starved press corps, before wading his way into the police station.

At the heart of this grand *tama-sha*, being played out almost in slow motion, Indrani sits on the precipice, a sword hanging over the head. In the end, is this Indrani as Medea, who resolved to kill her own children? Or Indrani as Icarus, who flew too close to the sun? Or, as modern-day fables go, does the Indrani story hold the mirror to an ambitious nation longing for success about the dark alleys that could follow the unbridled thirst for pelf and power? Hark back to the Indrani who wanted to be the one sheep that looked the other way. Was she always a wolf in lamb's clothing?

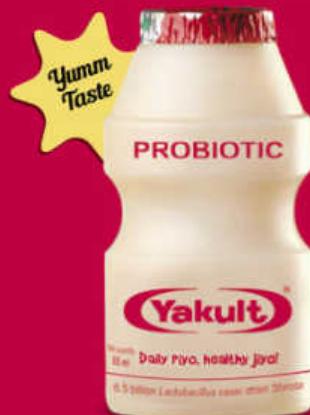


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PRIME MINISTER
NARENDRA MODI
IN BHAGALPUR

RANJAN RAHI

MODI SETS THE PACE

In a matter of four rallies in five weeks, PM Modi has turned the BJP around from playing catch-up. It's now setting the agenda and making the Nitish-Lalu combine sweat

| By Amitabh Srivastava |

"Aapko sunayi deta hai? Niche aayiye, bhaiyya."

It was 1.35 on a sweltering afternoon in Bhagalpur, eastern Bihar, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi was already two-and-a-half hours late. The crowd could not care less. Looking for vantage position, some youths had climbed up the bamboo poles that held the huge tent, which prompted that mild rebuke from the Prime Minister—Can you hear me? Please come down.

For the tens of thousands of people

who had come to Bhagalpur's unused airbase for the rally on September 1, Narendra Modi may not have fulfilled all his election promises—in fact his critics say he has failed to fulfil even one—but this personal touch was just as important as the well-oiled, hi-tech machinery taking his message to every bylane of Bihar. By the end of the 39-minute speech, the crowd was loving it. Modi, ever the BJP's mascot, was back doing what he has done best over the last couple of years, barring a setback in the Delhi assembly elections earlier this year: setting the poll agenda, and deciding on the discourse—he

it political or personal.

Four "parivartan" (change) rallies in five weeks since the first one in Muzaffarpur on July 25, each bigger than the earlier, and he has managed to make the election revolve around himself—his accomplishments, his purported failures, his model of governance and his pattern of development. He has reaffirmed his popularity despite the unfulfilled promises and become the centrepiece of the BJP campaign to wrest Bihar on its own for the first time.

By the time the Bhagalpur rally wound up, Modi's shoot-and-scoot



ON THE BALL

Five ways in which Narendra Modi has changed the dialogue in Bihar

- Modi has been dictating the poll agenda, and by reacting to everything he says his opponents have allowed him do that.
- **He has clubbed Lalu and Nitish together. If Nitish wants to profit from Lalu's votes, he is being asked to answer for the RJD's "Jungle Raj" as well.**
- Shoot-and-scoot strategy means he attacks rivals and then ignores their jibes, before shifting the goalpost and beginning a new discourse.
- **Trumped opponents by drawing a bigger line. After he announced a special package for Bihar, Nitish announced his own package.**
- Has eschewed caste and communal lines and remained focused on development and caste-neutral sections of the electorate such as the youth and women.

script seemed part of a well-thought-out electoral strategy. Here's how it works: Modi fires the first salvo and engages rivals on one issue before quickly shifting the goalpost, thus denying them the opportunity to take him head-on on any issue for a consolidated period of time. He started belligerently, attacking his main rivals Nitish Kumar of the JD(U) and Lalu Prasad Yadav of the RJD and exposed their contradictions in his first two public meetings (at Muzaffarpur, and Gaya on August 9). And just when Lalu and Nitish started to pay him back in the same coin, Modi took the conversation to the next level and announced a development package for Bihar, amounting to Rs 1.25 lakh crore, during his third in Arrah on August 18. He has refused to get drawn into the game of jibes and counter-jibes.

Happily for the BJP, his rivals swallowed the bait almost each time and committed unforced errors. Nitish,

who as the incumbent chief minister has more at stake in these elections, has issued several full-page newspaper advertisements at government expense to denounce the PM's special package. As a counter, he has unveiled his own Rs 2.7 lakh crore development plan. But if Nitish thought the Prime Minister would debate this, he was foot-faulted. Taking the elder statesman's route, Modi instead welcomed it. And then turned it to his own advantage. "It is good that development has become the poll plank," Modi said in Bhagalpur, asserting in all but those words that he had made Nitish focus on development.

Although Modi has skillfully ignored questions on his performance as prime minister, he obviously understands that his 15-month report card does not shine half-much as the one he presented as Gujarat chief minister before the General Election. He also knows that he needs to blunt the criticism that he is a non-performer. In Bhagalpur, he took the fight to the opposition camp, saying he will give an account of his performance on the eve of 2019 Lok Sabha polls. But, he added, it is time for Lalu and Nitish to justify their 25 years of rule. "Instead of telling the people what they have done, the two are talking only about Modi," he said.

This too is part of a strategy: club Nitish with Lalu together and ask them to justify the 25 years at the helm for the RJD and JD(U), deliberately ignoring the fact that his party was part of Nitish's government for nearly eight of those years. "The idea," says a senior leader from the state, "is clear. If Nitish Kumar is hoping to benefit from Lalu Prasad's vote bank, he should also take the blame for Lalu's non-governance. The two cannot shake off the Jungle Raj legacy." On his part, Nitish so far has refused to answer for the 15-year administration of Lalu and Rabri Devi. But the BJP, as Modi reminded yet again, will continue to ask it of him.

Picking his battles carefully, and thereby saving his retaliations for the critiques with potential to unleash

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SHAH'S STRATEGY

Not content with just technology, Amit Shah's message is simple: win the booth, win the polls

- Notwithstanding the massive turnouts at PM Modi's rallies, BJP chief Amit Shah has told the Bihar unit to remain focused on a four-layered operational strategy.
- **With Modi in the innermost circle, the other three layers are the raths (campaign vans), booth committees and Parivartan Yatra by state leaders.**
- Accordingly, 243 hi-tech vans equipped with GPS and LED panels, among other equipment and gadgets, are crisscrossing 243 constituencies to hold 125,000 village-level meetings and connect with the 50 million voters.
- **But being a man who believes in mass contact, Shah has sought booth committees of 10 to 15 people for each of the 62,779 booths spread across 8,643 panchayats.**
- The plan is to give these committee members a microphone and get them to address these meetings after video messages from the vans makes villagers congregate at a meeting point.
- **The performance of these booth committees, and Modi's impact, are two tools with which Shah hopes to bridge the 9-percentage point gap between NDA and the united vote share of RJD-JD(U)-Congress-NCP during the Lok Sabha polls.**
- The emphasis on booth committees holds significance, as even in the one-sided Lok Sabha polls the victory margin at 9,302 booths was barely 50 votes.



BJP PRESIDENT AMIT SHAH WITH SENIOR PARTY LEADERS IN PATNA

most harm, Modi is also letting go of half the barbs. At the combined opposition rally at Patna's historic Gandhi Maidan on August 30, Sonia Gandhi, Nitish and Lalu took scathing potshots at Modi. Calling him the 56-inch chest, Sonia thundered: "Has he done anything besides *showbaazi* (drama)?" "Challenging the DNA of Bihar is a man whose ancestors have had no role to play in the independence struggle," roared Nitish, while Lalu launched a personal broadside at the PM, even evoking his favoured caste appeal. Modi ignored them all. In one clean stroke he had suddenly become a bigger leader than the seemingly petty politician trio; and in one fell swoop corrected himself from entering into the game of name-calling, which had cost him against Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi.

Against that, recall Nitish's reaction after Modi, in his July 25 rally, questioned the Bihar CM's DNA for "backstabbing friends": Nitish wrote an open letter to the PM, followed it up by launching a "take back your word" campaign, issued a series of radio ads, and then asked JD(U) cadres to take samples of nails and hair of five million people for DNA testing—to be sent to the Prime Minister's Office.

Nitish's strategy of playing records of Modi's Lok Sabha campaign

speeches at his own meetings in a bid to expose the Prime Minister's unfulfilled promises have also come a cropper. They have failed to provoke Modi. Says a senior Bihar BJP leader, "We are campaigning for the electorate, not for Nitish or Lalu. And by not responding to their accusations, we have frustrated their idea of setting the poll agenda."

While Modi has allowed his alliance partners Ram Vilas Paswan, Jitan Ram Manjhi and Upendra Kushwaha to play the caste card, his job has been to attract the caste-neutral constituencies, such as women and youth, who have remained his biggest followers in Bihar.

To say that Bihar is a crucial election is to speak the obvious. For the BJP, a good showing here will not only undo the Delhi damage but also set the stage for next year's elections in West Bengal to the east and Uttar Pradesh to the west, where polls are due in 2017. For Nitish, this is a make-or-break election for his political career—at least in the medium term. For Modi, it's a question of stature—a win will increase his aura manifold, and a loss will suggest that the magic that had won him India in 2014, and a series of assembly elections soon after, may indeed be on the wane.

Follow the writer on Twitter @Amitabh1975

NITISH GETS A MAKEOVER

From Bihari pride to DNA campaign, Nitish, Lalu bank on former Modi man to turn the tables on the BJP

By Jyoti Malhotra

Outside the Gandhi Maidan in Patna on August 30, behind the carts selling 'Sudha' ice cream and bottled water, a row of neat and clean tables manned by men of all ages invite curiosity. On the tables are small plastic ziplock packets, which on closer inspection turn out to contain a few nail cuttings. Those who have gathered offer their heads to the men behind the counter, from which a lock of hair is cut and carefully placed inside another plastic pouch.

Both pouches, containing "samples of a Bihari's DNA", are the latest weapon in the battle for Bihar between the social justice alliance led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and the BJP-led NDA coalition of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The pouches will soon be attached to a postcard on which the donor's name and address is written, alongside that of PM Modi. *Mujhe Bihari hone par garv hai/Hamare DNA main koi kharabi nahin hai* (I am proud

of being Bihari, there is nothing wrong in my DNA), proclaims the postcard on the reverse side. Boxes of 1,000 cards each will soon be despatched by speed post to 7, Race Course Road, New Delhi.

To think that a stray comment by Modi attacking Nitish in his first rally in Muzaffarpur on July 25—"There is something wrong with Nitish Kumar's political DNA"—could have spurred a massive mobilisation in the RJD-JD(U) camp on the matter of "injured Bihari pride". Nitish has taken Modi's comment one step further by claiming that an insult to him is an insult to all of Bihar, and both Lalu Prasad of the RJD and Sonia Gandhi of the Congress have fallen in line with the motto.

In these days of life imitating Bollywood, leave alone art, it seems that Nitish and Prashant Kishor, the man behind the CM's public relations-cum-campaign-cum-media machine, were meeting people deep in the Bhagalpur region soon after Modi made his accusatory comment in Muzaffarpur.

A source close to Kishor, tells the story, "A peasant belonging to the

NITISH KUMAR HAS TERMED MODI'S DNA COMMENT AS AN INSULT TO ALL OF BIHAR



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SUCCESS SUTRA

Prashant Kishor hopes to help Nitish Kumar retain Bihar and Bihari pride with a hi-tech poll strategy

- Har Ghar Dastak (door-to-door campaign)
- 'Nothing-wrong-in-Bihari-DNA' campaign
- Constituency-wise data and analytics
- Digital campaign, including on social media
- Long-term vision for Bihar on Bihar2025.in



(FROM LEFT) SONIA GANDHI, NITISH KUMAR AND LALU PRASAD AT THE AUGUST 30 SWABHIMAN RALLY

Yadav caste seemed agitated at Modi's remarks against Nitish. *Voh humko dogala na kaha hai*, the peasant said, using a term of abuse that basically questions your parentage. We began to ask ourselves why people were so upset at Modi's comment. The nothing-is-wrong-with-my-Bihari-DNA campaign grew from there," he said.

Kishor, who worked very closely with Modi in Gujarat from December 2011 till the 2014 Lok Sabha victory—and even helped him informally brainstorm on critical issues regarding the BJP until recently—was able to quickly convince both Nitish and Lalu that in Modi's insult lay the germ of a new 'Brand Bihar', which had the capacity of firing both caste and development cylinders at the same time.

The 'swabhiman' tag word would frontally challenge Modi's 'parivartan' card, Kishor felt, igniting a new consensus in which Nitish's achievements on the governance side and Lalu's caste consolidation would give Modi and his allies a good run for their money. Moreover, it would pump up Nitish and Lalu, and more importantly their cadres, making them want to participate in the fight against the BJP, which had swept 31 of the 40 seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

For Lalu's aggressive and recently empowered Yadav community, the "insult to Bihar's DNA" certainly has the potential to take on Modi's "56-inch chest" bombast. At the joint rally in Patna over the weekend, young RJD

workers were euphoric with Lalu's gauntlet to BJP President Amit Shah, challenging him "to break away the Yaduvanshis", sensing that they were back in the fight after several years.

Kishor's comrades-in-arms, several young adults who jointly own the Indian Political Action Committee (IPAC), the organisation that is formally operating Nitish's war machine, say that in politically conscious Bihar, no one's afraid of politicians such as Amit Shah. That's how a key slogan was created: A fist in a blood-red revolutionary backdrop declared, "*Jhanse mein na aayenge/Nitish ko jitayenge* (We won't be fooled again/We will bring Nitish to power)." The billboards were splashed across Patna.

Apart from media and advertising, Kishor's team has pushed digital communication across social media and mobile phones, besides pushing data and analysis for each constituency. Grassroots campaigns have included "Har Ghar Dastak", a house-to-house campaign in which party workers knocked on at least 10 houses to spread the message (about 10 million households have been reached). Nitish's own focus on governance has led to the launch of an ambitious project called Bihar@2025.

Interestingly, Kishor's colleagues also once worked for Modi. Rishi Raj Singh was involved with Shah's campaign in Uttar Pradesh (where the BJP won 71 out of 80 seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls), while Pratik Jain was responsible for Maharashtra (where the BJP won 24 of 48 seats). Both laughed when asked how different the Nitish campaign was from Modi's. "Here, we have to do everything ourselves. For the 'Mahagathbandhan' (grand alliance) rally in Patna, we swept the stage, supervised the installation of the speakers and LCD TV screens, arranged for water, the chairs, and even suggested the order in which the speakers should speak," said Jain.

Added Shashank Mehta, another team member, "In Modi's campaign, it was totally different, beginning with the resources. There was no dearth of money. Here, we have to be very careful." With Nitish and Lalu and even the Congress pulling out all the stops for their August 20 rally, they showed they were capable of packing the Gandhi Maidan as well as Patna's thoroughfares.

Of course, the big difference is that while the JD(U) and the RJD are mass-based outfits, the BJP is a cadre-based party. After last year's ignominious defeat in the Lok Sabha elections,



SAMPLES OF A BIHARI'S DNA ARE THE LATEST WEAPON IN THE BATTLE FOR BIHAR.

RANJAN RAHI



IN PATNA

when the JD(U) won two seats and the RJD won four seats, both parties were in tatters. The two parties had fought against each other as well as against the BJP, which meant that the crucial 17 per cent Muslim vote, the 12 per cent Mahadalit vote and the 27 per cent Extremely Backward Castes (EBC) vote had split down the middle. Nitish was so spooked by his defeat that he gave up his CM chair in favour of Jitan Ram Manjhi of the EBC Musahar community. The move turned out to be disastrous. One of the first things Kishor is said to have told Nitish, when they met for the first time in December 2014 in Rajya Sabha member Pavan Varma's house in Delhi, was that it was imperative he return to the CM's saddle. Even a little power, Kishor implied, was better than no power at all.

Things moved swiftly after that. Nitish stared down Manjhi and became CM again, met Sonia Gandhi for the first time and agreed to come to terms with Lalu. All three parties, sworn enemies in the past, realised that they would have to swim together, if they didn't want to sink together. As Nitish admitted to INDIA TODAY, "Fact is, we have to defeat the BJP, what enmity are you talking about?"

By April 2015, soon after the BJP national executive meeting, Kishor had decided that he would join Nitish to run his campaign.

The move sent a tremor inside the BJP. Kishor was the man who knew too much. He had turned Congress veteran

Mani Shankar Aiyar's crude comment on Modi's tea boy antecedents on its head and launched a national "Chai pe Charcha" campaign. Kishor had also thought up the 3D hologram idea, beaming Modi's image in several hundred constituencies at the same time and generating much animated discussion. What would he do with Nitish?

Kishor refused to come on record for this story, but suffice to say that the IPAC has 800 people working for it on the Bihar campaign. The headquarters on Strand Road in Patna, a stone's throw away from the CM's house, is littered with youngsters with impressive degrees from the IITs and IIMs, and posters on Plato's philosophy ("one of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being ruled by your inferiors").

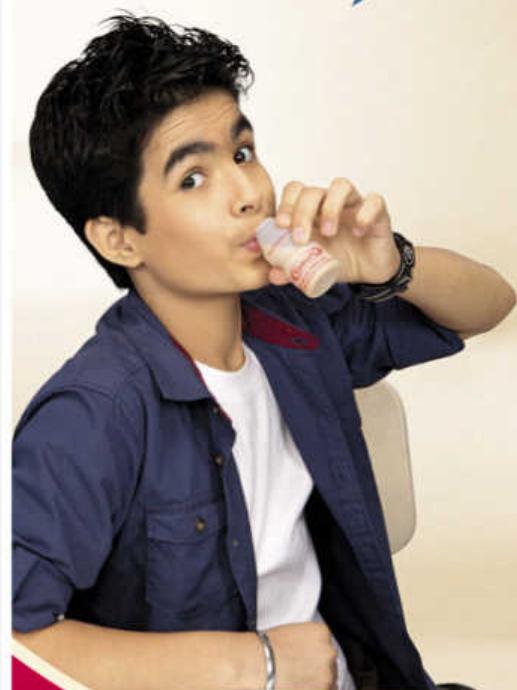
Kishor used to work and live in Modi's house in Ahmedabad; in Patna, he works from Nitish's residence. Certainly Modi and Kishor, both single as well as singularly driven, have much in common. But the similarity probably ends there. Kishor's contribution to Modi's fire-in-his-belly was to craft the message, both for the 2012 Gujarat assembly elections as well as the 2014 General Election.

As for the JD(U)-RJD alliance, Kishor has focused what was once a motley crowd and helped it return to Bihar's centre stage. He has sharpened Nitish's achievements so he can be ready with data to puncture holes in BJP's claims—like in Modi's recent accusation on the falling quality of healthcare in the state. Sometimes murmurs of dissent can be heard within the party, how a young, apolitical man has developed such influence over a major socialist party, but these have fallen silent in the face of the elaborate strategy the JD(U) has mounted.

The stakes are very high. A Modi-Shah victory will not only consolidate the BJP's power for the next several years, it will decimate the opposition. On the other hand, if the JD(U)-RJD-Congress combine wins, it will put an end to the narrative about Modi's BJP being invincible. All eyes are on Bihar.

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BJP PRESIDENT AMIT SHAH DURING A VISIT TO THE SREE PADMANABHASWAMY TEMPLE IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

BJP TARGETS HINDU DIVIDED FAMILY

By Charmy Harikrishnan

The BJP in Kerala is losing its political temerity. It is now flaunting a swagger, a muscular Hindutva that could seem improbable, unviable, in a state that has 27 per cent Muslims and 18 per cent Christians. What gives? The meticulous electoral tutelage of Amit Shah, under which the party is betting on the rest of the populace: the 55 per cent Hindus. The BJP wants to metamorphose into a Hindu *rath* where the backward

Ezhava, the upper-caste Namboodiri and the Scheduled Caste Pulaya can clamber on.

The Hindu unity is socially an illusion. Can it then become a political reality? Many Malayali Hindus of a certain vintage, in an impulse of modernity and impelled by communism, may have given up their caste surnames, but this is a society that is still acutely caste-conscious, that wouldn't rest until it has figured out your caste and have you pinned and wriggling on the wall of hierarchy. Can the aggressive Hindu gambit pull

The BJP flaunts a muscular Hindutva in a state where nearly half the population is Muslim and Christian. The agenda: consolidate the 55 per cent Hindu vote.

these different sections, which publicly and privately smirk at each other, into the BJP, as Kerala heads towards the local body polls in a few months and assembly elections in 2016?

State President V. Muraleedharan says that in the 2016 polls, the BJP will pitch itself as the alternative to the two coalitions that have been taking turns to rule Kerala—the incumbent, Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) and the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF). This is ambitious for a party that got no seats and just 6 per cent votes in the 2011

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assembly elections. However, the BJP is planning to build on the 10.3 per cent vote share in the 2014 General Election and an unexpected increase in its vote share in the Aruvikkara by-election in June—a 17 percentage point jump that cut into the anti-incumbency votes that should have otherwise favoured the CPI(M).

A detailed plan of the electorate has been readied by the BJP, an exhaustive list that notes the caste and religion of every citizen eligible to vote in every ward. In that there are three columns: a) the party he or she will definitely vote for; b) the party he or she is likely to vote for; and c) the party he or she will certainly not vote for. The BJP wants to look at people who are likely to vote for it and then campaign to convert the “maybe” into “yes”.

In the 2014 General Election, even Christians, who traditionally vote for the Congress or the Kerala Congress, were not immune to Narendra Modi, with 9 per cent voting for the BJP. About 16 per cent Muslims also voted for the party, according to a study by Lokniti, a research programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS). But the BJP, as of now, seems reluctant to tap into that, to even pretend inclusiveness for

a wider vote base. Muraleedharan says Shah has been clear in his commandments: “We are going to aggressively position ourselves against the Congress and the CPI(M). We will be contesting in all the seats in local body polls. We will be putting up candidates under our symbol. Independents will be a rarity. We will give representation to all Hindu communities and most of our candidates will be Hindus. We will be concentrating on 125 of the 140 assembly seats.” This means the BJP is not counting on the Muslim-majority seats in Malabar.

If the BJP roped in Mahadalit Jitan Ram Manjhi in Bihar, the BJP is wooing Ezhava leader Vellappally Natesan

in Kerala. He is the general secretary of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, the organisation founded over a century ago by social reformer Sree Narayana Guru to uplift the backward Ezhavas, the largest community in the state. They have traditionally allied with the Left but if their loyalties shift, it could be the biggest game changer in Kerala politics in recent times.

Vishva Hindu Parishad leader Pravin Togadia and the SNDP Yogam are already planning to open a hospital in Idukki district that will provide free treatment to poor Hindus. The motto is likely to be ‘Healthy Hindu, Happy Hindu’—a stark and misplaced assertion of faith in a secular space like a hospital, in a state with a unique mix of religions. Vitriolic Hindutva was in evidence again on August 30 when Natesan’s guest for the birth anniversary celebrations of Sree Narayana Guru turned out to be BJP’s Sadhviji Niranjan Jyoti. The saffron-clad backward caste minister had her ignorant diatribe ready: “Hindus should protect their daughters from non-believers.”

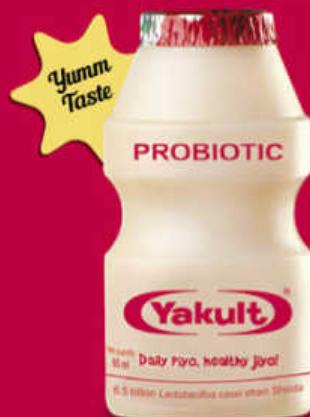
When Amit Shah met with Natesan and his son Thushar in Delhi recently, there were assumptions that Natesan would ally with the BJP in return for a Rajya Sabha seat for Thushar. “The BJP is not an untouchable party. We will act as a political pressure group. What we want is the unity of Hindus—across castes, from Namboodiri to Nayadi,” says Natesan. That is precisely the language of the BJP.

In the 2014 General Election, 23 per cent of BJP votes were of Ezhavas, compared with just 12 per cent in 2009. Can the party sway the community further through Natesan? If so, it will be the beginning of the end of the Left in the state.

The BJP has already got the support of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, which works for the uplift of Pulayars.

THE EZHAVAS HAVE TRADITIONALLY ALLIED WITH THE LEFT BUT IF THEIR LOYALTIES SHIFT TO THE BJP, IT COULD BE A BIG GAME CHANGER.

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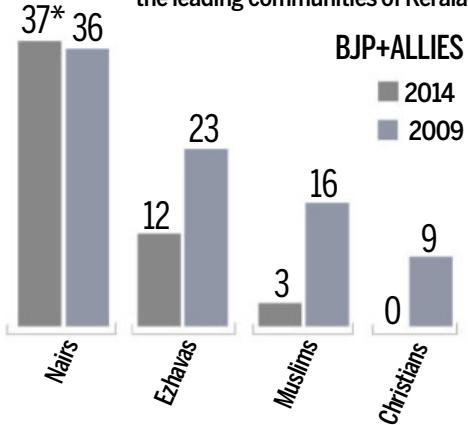
2014 HOW THE NUMBERS CHANGED FOR BJP

Its vote share jumped from 6 per cent to 10 per cent, thanks to the Modi wave

VOTES RECEIVED BY COALITIONS/
PARTIES IN 2009/2014

		SEATS WON	VOTE SHARE
UDF	2009	16	47.73%
	2014	12	42%
LDF	2009	4	41.89%
	2014	8	40.1%
BJP	2009	0	6.31%
	2014	0	10.3%
OTHERS (including Independents and NOTA)	2009	0	5.07%
	2014	0	7.6%

Vote share of BJP and allies among the leading communities of Kerala



*Figures in percentage Source: CSDS Data Unit

Its President N.K. Neelakantan said, "It is often said that the Sangh's ways have resulted in our backwardness. We are willing to forget that history if they take this chance to correct themselves."

All these have set the cat among the secular pigeons. An anxious CPI said secularism should not be reduced to an appeasement of minorities, that Hindus should not be sidelined. The CPI(M) wants to resist the coming together of the SNDP and the BJP—but is yet to figure out how. "The CPI(M) would expose Natesan who is allying with the BJP to further his personal ambitions, to give his son a political position. He has no qualms in tarnishing the great secular ideals of Sree Narayana Guru who said 'Whatever be the religion, it suffices if it makes a better man,'" says Opposition leader V.S. Achuthanandan.

The BJP has been wooing the OBCs since the 1990s. As writer Christophe Jaffrelot says, "In 1991, Kalyan Singh showed that OBC card could be the winner in Uttar Pradesh. Narendra Modi, Shivraj Chouhan, Uma Bharti, Babulal Gaur have all been OBC chief ministers of the BJP." But this is the first time the party is attempting a systematic enticement of OBCs in Kerala.

Kerala is becoming increasingly polarised. Many Hindus blanch when P.K. Abdu Rabb, the education minister from the Muslim League, refuses to light a lamp at an inauguration ceremony, saying it is a Hindu custom, and when he changes the name of his official residence from Ganga to Grace. The BJP uses these incidents to question the secular credentials of the Congress-led UDF. Muraleedharan says: "We will make these an election issue. The Muslim League cannot get away with it. Next, they would want to ban Onam, saying it is a Hindu festival. They would want to ban the pookkalam and thiruvathirakkali (the flower carpets and dance associated with Onam). The Hindus are the most disadvantaged section in the state."

Writer and commentator N.S. Madhavan is sceptical about BJP's efforts and "its local leaders who are men of straw". But the BJP supporter

here is focused on Modi. While the BJP enthusiasts elsewhere in the country are vociferous, in Kerala it has a critical silent section that is wary of being shouted down by strident Leftists but has quietly made up its mind on Modi.

Madhavan says, "The BJP is banking on the received wisdom that governments alternate between UDF and LDF for communal reasons: that UDF governments give into Muslim and Christian interests, leaving resentful Hindus to consolidate under the LDF. This time the BJP fancies a chance to partake a portion of the Hindu pie. But it is so 20th century. Now, in Kerala, other factors such as aspirations drive electoral behaviour more than communal reasons."

The BJP is aware of the aspirational Malayali. That is why roping in the OBCs is likely to be just one of its hydra-headed strategies. After banding together the Hindus, the Modi government is likely to dangle a development package for Kerala, like the latest one for Bihar, to impress upon the other communities that the party means business.

The BJP is yet to show its strength beyond a few pockets such as Thiruvananthapuram. But it is queering the pitch, changing the game. As it tries to spray saffron on Kerala's green, it would be foolish to look away.

Follow the writer on Twitter @charmyh

THE BJP IS USING THE PRESENCE OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE IN THE RULING UDF TO QUESTION THE SECULAR CREDENTIALS OF COALITION LEADER CONGRESS.

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AN ALLY IN DIRE NEED

Chandrababu Naidu fights to save the TDP's popularity as Delhi delays special incentives and the opposition back home makes political capital of this failure

By Amarnath K. Menon

Telangana may be the new state but it is Andhra Pradesh that is facing problems associated with infancy—seeking attention and special care. To grow at par with the “more developed” neighbouring states, especially Telangana, Andhra Pradesh is eyeing the coveted “special category” status, seeking a booster dose from the Narendra Modi government at the Centre in the form of status and grants over and above those offered by the Finance Commission.

While the special status seemed a done deal in the aftermath of the debate on the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Bill in the dying days of the previous Lok Sabha, New Delhi appears somewhat reluctant now.

The problem has snowballed for Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu with five people, starting with a Congress activist’s self-immolation in Tirupati on August 8, committing suicide in the month of August itself to press home the demand. Politically, Naidu has come under fire after Modi’s announcement of a Rs 1.25-lakh crore special development package for Bihar. Both his rivals—the YSR Congress and the Congress—have stepped up pressure, accusing Naidu of failing to convince the Modi government.

Naidu realises the pressing need for the status, which will open up avenues for more central funds. He is under siege as the state needs finances to create its new capital, Amaravati; develop existing urban nodes such as Visakhapatnam, Kakinada and

Tirupati; help launch employment-generating businesses and establish new institutions after most of them went to Telangana, thanks to their location in Hyderabad. Naidu tried to impress upon Modi the need for the status, and the funds, during their meeting on August 25. “The Centre should come to our rescue and grant us a level playing field,” the CM says.

Following the meeting, Modi asked NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Arvind Panagariya to prepare a road map for implementation of promises in the 2014 Reorganisation Act. He reportedly assured Naidu that the financial package will be announced thereafter. Whether it is the formal sanction of the special category status or announcing a financial package, or both, Delhi’s decision is long delayed. “The

NAIDU'S WISH LIST

Some of the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister's demands to bail out the cash-strapped state

Rs 42,935 crore

to build new Raj Bhavan, high court, secretariat, legislature buildings and houses for government employees

Rs 5,000 crore

to launch new central institutions and other entities to make up for institutions "lost" to Telangana

Rs 5,000 crore

to develop industrial townships, estates and parks as incentives to set up greenfield manufacturing units

Rs 2,100 crore

annually for seven districts of north coastal AP and Rayalaseema for next five years to bridge inequities

Allow the state to directly attract foreign loans and investment for development

bifurcation process has been cruel to Andhra Pradesh, as the economic growth engines are in and around Hyderabad," says political commentator C. Narasimha Rao. "Knowing this, both Modi and Naidu should have agreed on incentives to be offered within six months of assuming office."

With the suicides and the political heat turning out to be onerous, the Chief Minister is at his wits' end trying to alter the perception that all is lost for Andhra Pradesh, as also to cool the tempers. "Special importance for the state is top on my agenda, and both the TDP and the BJP are fighting for it," Naidu says. The Centre is playing

ball—at least on the reassurance front, if not forking out anything tangible. Says Union Urban Development Minister M. Venkaiah Naidu, "We have not gone back on anything for AP. We need time to work out the scheme, as nine other states are demanding similar (special category) status."

Besides the provisions and promises made in the Reorganisation Act, 2014 the CM is banking on a long wish list to bail out his cash-strapped state. In keeping with the provisions of the act, the Centre has already given a grant of Rs 2,300 crore to meet revenue deficit, Rs 1,500 crore to construct the new capital city, and Rs 350 crore

towards development of backward districts in 2014-15. But Naidu is awaiting more aid, particularly for housing, in the hope of persuading employees to move out of Hyderabad to the new capital city quickly. He is also striving to get exclusive foreign investments from Japan, Singapore and China, countries he has already visited, to develop social infrastructure (see box).

Naidu is desperate because he knows the TDP has to show tangible results for it to be reelected in 2019. But with the fund flow likely to be slower than his demand, he may discover that it is also denting his popularity.

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HOW INDIA FOILED PAKISTAN'S PLAN TO SEIZE JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Fifty years ago India successfully thwarted Pakistan's attempt to militarily seize Jammu and Kashmir. The conflict began when India defended itself against rapid military action in Kashmir, especially after its defeat in the 1962 war with China. The conflict was triggered off in the Valley by inducting trained saboteurs. When that failed, Pakistan launched a full-scale invasion.



PAKISTAN'S 'K' PLOT

Pakistani leaders led by Field Marshal Ayub Khan concluded that Indian Army was not strong enough to Ayub also believed Kashmiris were disenchanted with the Indian rule and resistance movement could be military offensive to which India launched a counter-attack. The war, however, ended in a stalemate.



Campaigns by Dalits to claim their rightful share of the cultivable common lands are currently underway in

3 Barnala

65 Sangrur

8* Kapurthala

72 Jalandhar

2 Patiala

Punjab

*Number of villages



Photographs by SANDEEP SAHDEV

COLLECTIVE CRUSADE

Dalits in Punjab are beginning to assert themselves through communal farming

By Asit Jolly

There's a cheerily child-like spring to his step. You wouldn't believe that 52-year-old Karnal Singh spent 59 days in jail even as he nursed a severely crushed forearm—result of a brutal police lathi-charge. The stainless steel prosthesis doctors put in to save his battered limb still hurts, but for the first time in his life it's been worth all the pain.

On Baisakhi this April 14, after working as serfs for many generations, cutting and bringing in the crop of upper-caste Jat zamindars, Karnal Singh joined 700 other Dalits of Balad Kalan village in Punjab's Sangrur district, in the first real harvest of their lives—2,640 quintals of wheat sown, tended and collected from farmland

they leased jointly from the panchayat. Now, they are looking to bring home an even more bountiful crop of paddy.

From seeding to eventually being allowed to reap the rewards, it's been a truly tumultuous and decidedly painful journey for 143 Dalit households in Balad Kalan.

Although a key 1961 legislation—the Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act—decrees that all panchayats in the state must mandatorily reserve 33 per cent of all available *shamlat* or common land for lease to Scheduled Castes (SCs), for years upper-caste farmers, local sarpanchs and revenue officials have invariably been complicit in hosting dummy SC claimants to deprive real Dalit families access to such holdings.

The story was no different in Balad Kalan. On June 27, 2014, Karnal Singh

and his comrades, for the first time alerted to their rights by the Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee (ZPSC), a loose, Left-oriented coalition working for land rights in Sangrur, came out of their homes to battle a 500-strong posse of Punjab Police men. The riot-ready policemen had been called out to support panchayat and revenue officials attempting to subvert the auction of 121 acres of common land reserved for lease to SCs. "They (the police) were brutal," says Paramjit Kaur, 38, who spent weeks in a coma after a particularly vicious policeman repeatedly pounded her on the head with his baton. Forty-one Dalit men were charged with "attempt to murder" and incarcerated without bail for 59 days. This, until August 28, 2014, when the state administration and panchayat agreed on a 'samjhauta'

FARMERS OF BENRA VILLAGE IN SANGRUR PAVED THE WAY FOR THE FIRST FUNCTIONAL DALIT COLLECTIVE FARM IN PUNJAB AFTER WINNING THE LEASE FOR NINE ACRES OF LAND IN 2008

and surrendered control of the land.

Balad Kalan echoes an unprecedented transformation that is overtaking rural Punjab, quietly but firmly challenging, even demolishing, age-old caste equations. Dalit collectives like in Balad Kalan have managed to take control of common land legally reserved for Scheduled Caste communities in as many as 16 Sangrur villages.

While Dalits have for long been agitating for access to land, the movement for village commons began to gather steam after 2008, when a group of youths in Benra village, 50 km from Balad Kalan, succeeded in rallying together all 250 Dalit households to gain control of nine acres—even forcing the district administration to cut lease rates. “Like in every other village, here too the Jat zamindars had proxies helping them bid for land that could only be leased to Dalits. We created a

situation wherein no Dalit had the courage to stand in as a proxy for a zamindar,” says Bahal Singh, 30, who helped raise the Kranti Pendu Mazdoor Union to lead the campaign in Benra.

Right through the summer and monsoon of 2008, every Dalit man, woman and child maintained a zealous vigil forestalling attempts by Jat landlords intent on grabbing land reserved for Scheduled Castes. “We physically surrounded and forced, even carried away, proxy claimants from the auctions,” says Balbir Kaur, 65, who led Benra’s Dalit women and schoolgirls to stand vigil at the land lease auctions.

Late in 2008, Bahal Singh and his

FOR YEARS UPPER-CASTE FARMERS, LOCAL SARPANCHS AND REVENUE OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN DENYING DALIT FAMILIES ACCESS TO COMMON LAND.

friends succeeded in winning the lease for the nine acres, also paving the way for what must be documented as the first functional Dalit collective farm in Punjab. The nine-acre holding has been life-altering for impoverished households. Twenty-seven-year-old Harbans Kaur used to trudge for miles every day in search of green fodder for the lone cow her family struggled to feed. “There were days when I had to return with no more than a handful of weeds,” she recalls. Increasing mechanisation and use of herbicides on farms increased yields particularly for crops such as paddy, but also meant that the weeds Dalit workers traditionally gathered as fodder were no longer available. Left to forage along irrigation canals and the fringes of Jat-owned farms, Dalit women invariably became targets of abuse.

Benra’s Dalit women were understandably reluctant to describe the abuse but the Punjabi hinterland abounds with tales of oppression, from



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Sandip Kaur 25

Matoi village, Sangrur district

She led an agitation by educated Dalit girls in 2014 to win the lease of 17 bighas of farm-land on May 28, 2015. Fodder crops from the land now mean that her mother Amarjit Kaur and other women no longer need to forage for green fodder to feed their cattle.



Karnal Singh 52

Balad Kalan village, Sangrur district

The landless wage earner sustained serious injuries in 2014 during a Dalit agitation to take control of 121 acres of common land. He, along with other Dalit families, has benefited with a share in the biannual wheat-paddy harvest and multiple fodder crops.

Bant Singh Jhabbar whose limbs were hacked off by a group of Jats for trying to protect his daughter from sexual abuse in January 2006, to the 16-year-old Dalit girl of Sangrur's Kalbanjara village who set herself on fire on August 5 this year reportedly to escape harassment by upper-caste youth.

In a deliberate departure from the traditional wheat-paddy cycle, all nine acres leased by the Dalit collective are planted with fodder crops—*barseem* (clover) and *chari* (sorghum)—all year round. And for as little as Rs 400 (half the market price) members of the collective can harvest one biswa (1/96th of an acre). But since there is limited land, each Dalit family is allowed no more than 10 biswa. The system, managed by an 11-member committee, works seamlessly, dividing the produce equitably, while ensuring sufficient earnings to bid for the land year after year.

"The *chari* this year is sweet like sugarcane," Bahal swears, happily chewing a stalk of sorghum.

Inspired by what had been accomplished in Benra, a group of eight Dalit girls in Matoi, a small hamlet outside the Muslim-majority township of Malerkotla, also decided to stand up for themselves. After a year this May,

Sandip Kaur, 25, and her friends, all college students, won the lease for 17 bighas (3.4 acres) of land.

Although relatively small, Sandip's mother Amarjit Kaur says the holding is a "godsend" that now makes it possible for several Dalit families in the village to keep cows and buffaloes.

In Balad Kalan, where the Dalits possess a significantly larger land holding (550 bighas or 121 acres), the benefits added up to a virtual bounty. At the Baisakhi harvest this April, each of the 143 Dalit households received four quintals of free wheat and a trolley load of *toori* (dry fodder) and the right to harvest fresh fodder from 10 biswa land. The land also ensured round-the-year employment for 100 people as farmhands and occasional work for many more during the sowing season. "We also sold wheat worth Rs 24 lakh in the mandi and used the money to make a repeat bid for the land in May," says Rampal, 55, responsible for maintaining records for Balad Kalan's Dalit collective.

ZPSC convener Mukesh Malaudh, 28, who has been closely associated with the movement to reclaim reserved common lands, is convinced that collective farms are the only real solution for Dalit families to benefit from what is their right. "A third of the 1.54 lakh acres cultivable *shamlat*

land in Punjab should legally only be in Dalit hands. But barring the handful of Sangrur villages, a major chunk of the holdings are usurped unlawfully by upper-caste zamindars," he says.

"Depriving Dalits of land has been part of an insidious design in which upper caste landlords and the establishment are complicit," says P.S. Verma, a Chandigarh-based academic and author of a pivotal early 1990s study of rural common lands in Punjab and Haryana. It is only with the organisational backing of some Left groups that villages in Sangrur and some others in the Doaba region (Jalandhar-Kapurthala-Hoshiarpur) are now making successful bids for their land, Verma adds.

Dalits in only a few dozen among Punjab's 12,000-plus villages have gained access to their share of the *shamlat*. The numbers, although small, are significant in a state like Punjab which has been increasingly in the grip of an agrarian crisis amid shrinking size of landholdings, rapidly depleting groundwater table and rising cost of pursuing the Green Revolution cropping cycle of wheat and paddy. Both with the fodder crops in Benra and the mix of fodder and wheat in Balad Kalan, the Dalit collectives are happily proving that farming can still be a mutually beneficial venture—making for distinctly better living and the sense of empowerment that land brings to deprived people.

Follow the writer on Twitter @Asitjolly

THE DALIT COLLECTIVES ARE PROVING THAT FARMING CAN STILL BE A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL VENTURE.

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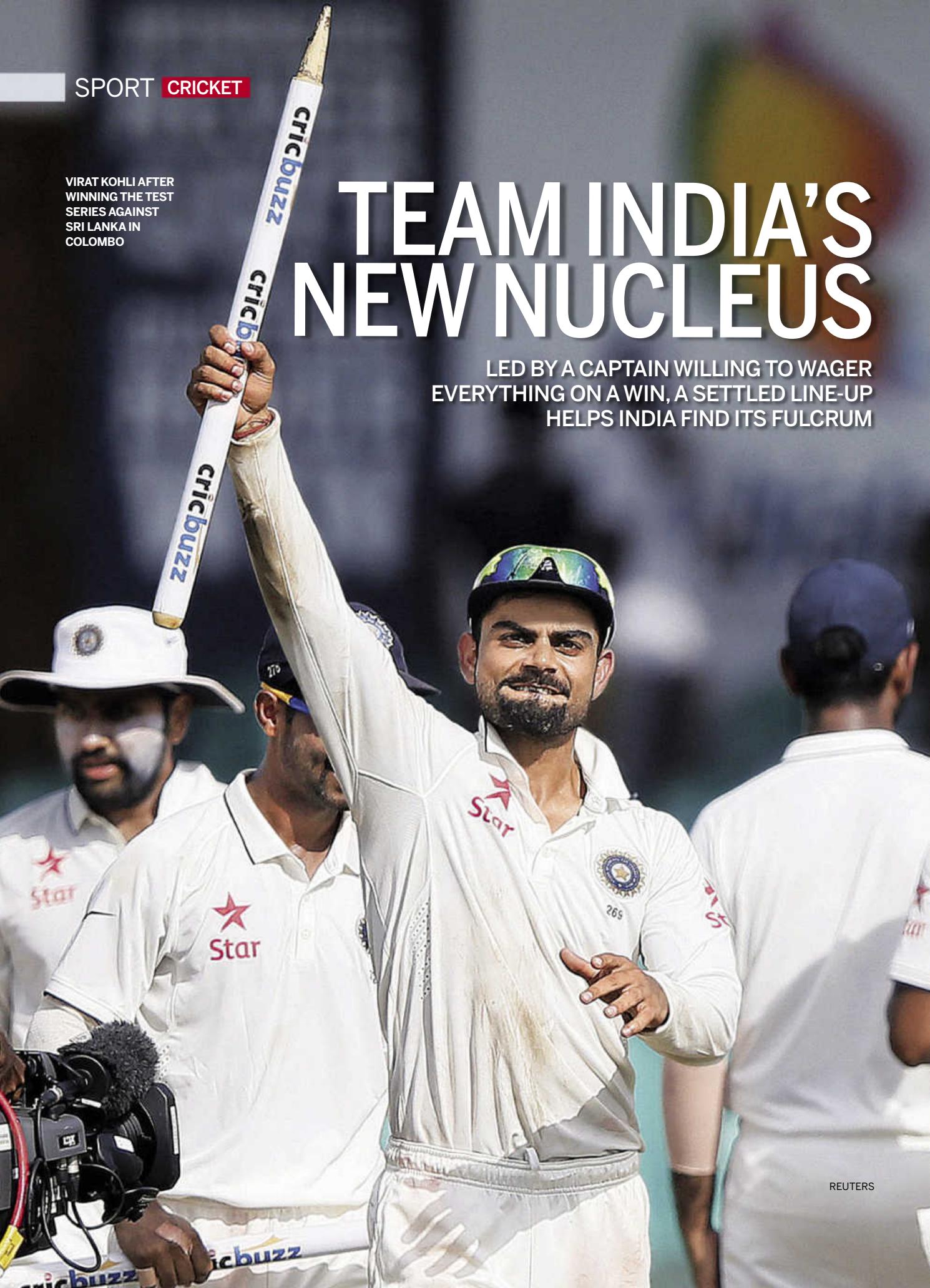


business today
FOR MANAGING TOMORROW

VIRAT KOHLI AFTER
WINNING THE TEST
SERIES AGAINST
SRI LANKA IN
COLOMBO

TEAM INDIA'S NEW NUCLEUS

LED BY A CAPTAIN WILLING TO WAGER
EVERYTHING ON A WIN, A SETTLED LINE-UP
HELPS INDIA FIND ITS FULCRUM



By Vikrant Gupta

Galle was the seminal moment for Virat Kohli. The Test had been lost, unbelievably so after controlling what looked like one-way traffic, bar a session or two, and there was deathly silence in the Indian dressing room. He lost it, venting his frustration and challenging his team to show they belonged. Two more Tests, went his ultimatum, else I won't fight for you. The make-or-break dictat was met with stunned silence.

As the team bus pulled out of Lighthouse Hotel the next morning, and by the time they checked into Colombo's Taj Samudra, the three-hour drive was used by a few players to chat with the captain. The defeat hurt us, they told Kohli, and no mistake will be repeated. The captain had lost the battle but he could now sense he could win the war. The boys wanted to be men.

Cut to the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) Ground in Colombo. Standing on the balcony outside the dressing room in Sri Lanka's most languid ground, and with a handful of Indian fans cheering the team after a 117-run win in the last Test, Kohli surveyed the spoils of battle. A series win in Sri Lanka after 22 long years. In an instant, he took off his shirt, and, for a moment it looked as if Sourav Ganguly's 2002 Lord's act would be repeated. But Kohli refrained, merely tossing the shirt and a few other souvenir items to the fans gathered below. While the players celebrated the win with a party thrown by Team Director Ravi Shastri at the hotel, Kohli made yet another stirring speech. "Winning should be our habit. We have to be No. 1 again," he said.

This is the beginning of the era of Kohli, and it will perhaps be different from what had happened in recent times when India flopped badly in overseas Tests. The Sri Lanka win is India's first overseas Test series victory in four years, and it has come riding on the bowlers for a change. In the three Test matches, spread over six Lankan innings, India picked up all 60 wickets with no overbearing dependence on

KOHLI'S STRENGTHS

1

Great gambler

While wanting to win, he doesn't shy away from challenges out of fear of losing.

2

Bowler's captain

Wants bowlers to pick 20 wickets. Plays five bowlers, lets them choose their field.

3

Makes it happen

Doesn't wait for things to happen in Tests, works on strategies to create opportunities.

4

Performance pays

Believes in horses for courses. Told team mates that batting numbers will be decided on the basis of performance.

5

Power of youth

Has inherited a relatively young side where he can set his own vision and agenda. Not afraid of calling a spade a spade.

**THE SRI LANKA WIN
IS INDIA'S FIRST
OVERSEAS TEST
SERIES VICTORY
IN FOUR YEARS
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ON THE
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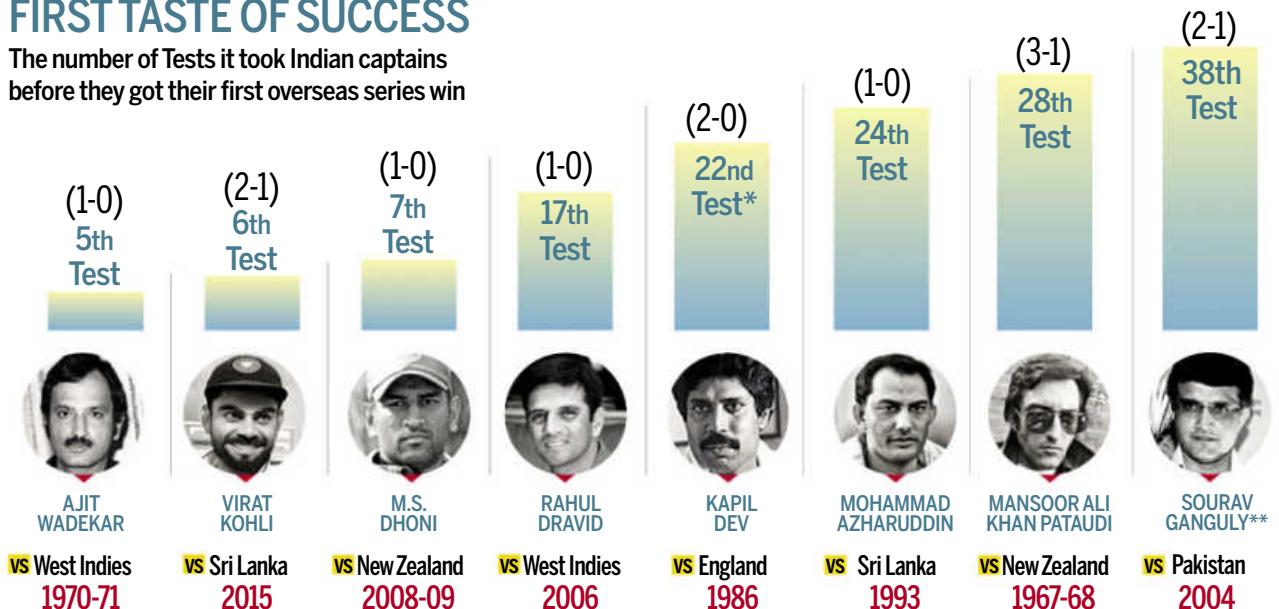
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FIRST TASTE OF SUCCESS

The number of Tests it took Indian captains before they got their first overseas series win



*India had won the series by the end of second Test **Ganguly won his first overseas series as captain against Bangladesh in 2000-2001, but it was a one-off Test

figures in () indicate victory margin

ETERNAL WAIT

Those who never won an overseas series



*No of Tests captained, but never won overseas

a particular set of bowlers—spin or seam. Aside from the bowling changes in Galle, where he let Sri Lanka off the hook in their second innings, Kohli read pitch and match conditions almost perfectly, and the way pacer Ishant Sharma responded to his skipper's call is perhaps India's biggest gain from the tour.

A daring stroke-player with wonderful technique and the instincts of a gambler, the aggressive Kohli is also inspiring his young colleagues, many of whom now form the backbone of the team. This is a new Indian team taking shape, not so much in terms of new personnel, but in terms of a new self-belief. Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara, who announced his intent with a match-winning unbeaten 145 at the SSC, seem

destined to serve long stints alongside Kohli in the middle order. Murali Vijay, Shikhar Dhawan and K. Rahul offer decent rotation in the opener's slot. And the fast-bowling unit of Ishant and Umesh Yadav is looking just as settled as R. Ashwin is as the side's frontline spinner.

This new nucleus is being helped by the fact that India, after a long time, has a captain who is willing to take risks to win Test matches by playing with five bowlers. With more options in attack, Kohli is able to attack in short spells, willing his fast bowlers to pick wickets even on slow surfaces in the subcontinent.

Dressing room insiders say the captain's confidence allowed seniors such as Harbhajan Singh and Amit Mishra to respond to the challenge as well. Harbhajan may have had a pedestrian Test in Galle but Mishra has lent teeth to India's spin department. While Ashwin's 21 wickets fetched him the Man of the Series award in Sri Lanka, Mishra, too, averaged a wicket in less than 30 deliveries. "The captain giving you confidence is your strength and Virat made it clear that he wanted us to pick wickets at any cost," Mishra says.

But Kohli's best strength may be

his flexibility. He was quick to admit mistakes in the Galle defeat. Much as he was criticised for asking Stuart Binny to be flown in and immediately be drafted in the playing XI, he was proved right. Rohit Sharma's not so-sweet sojourn at No. 3 meant him swapping slots with Ajinkya Rahane, who in turn may not also be so happy there. But the moment Pujara, the final piece in this jigsaw, fitted in by scoring his match-winning century in the last Test, Kohli's batting line-up got its mojo back. Against South Africa, over four Tests, India are expected to open with Vijay and Dhawan, with

THE MUTUAL ADMIRATION CLUB BETWEEN KOHLI AND TEAM DIRECTOR RAVI SHASTRI IS ALLOWING THEM TO BACK EACH OTHER ON TOUGH DECISIONS.





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THE FAIL-SAFE FIVE

**Cheteshwar Pujara**

Kohli's search for an effective No. 3 has ended with Pujara hitting a match-winning 100, albeit as a stopgap opener.

**R. Ashwin**

There was a question mark over his wicket-taking ability when bowling overseas.
Not anymore.

**Ishant Sharma**

Seems to have finally found the right length that will give his high-arm action the decisive edge.

**Ajinkya Rahane**

Scored a century while batting at No. 3. The new ball can pose problems but he can attack both spinners and pacers.

**Rohit Sharma**

If he can convert starts into centuries, he can help Kohli in taking the attack to the opposition.

REUTERS



R. ASHWIN IN ACTION DURING THE COLOMBO TEST MATCH

Pujara, Kohli and Rahane following in that order. If Kohli plays with six batsmen, Rohit will bat at No. 6.

"No slot is sacrosanct in this batting order," says Kohli, "We will define roles for individuals based on conditions and the needs of the team. Everybody is excited because ultimately all the players have the team's interest at heart."

There is a temptation to draw parallels between this team and Ganguly's when he took over in 2000. Although Ganguly had legends-in-the-making in the form of Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid and Anil Kumble in the side, he built the team by banking on youngsters such as Virender Sehwag, Yuvraj Singh, Zaheer Khan and Harbhajan Singh, and backing them to the hilt. It was a careful blend of experience with youth that created a supply chain of regular match-winners. Kohli has the same opportunity now. "I don't think Virat's captaincy should be compared with mine, or Dravid's or Dhoni's," says Ganguly, "I had said his passion reminds me of Diego Maradona, and believe me, he can have the same effect on his team mates. He has the vision, and he has the game. If he can

relate to the needs and demands of his players, he will go far."

The team is also benefiting from the mutual admiration club between Kohli and Team Director Ravi Shastri, who had backed him in a bitter tussle for Test captaincy with M.S. Dhoni, which seemingly led to Dhoni announcing his Test retirement midway through the Australia series in December last year. Dressing-room sources say that their partnership and like-mindedness on several key issues—including the decision to play five bowlers in certain conditions or shuffling the batting order—is having a positive effect on the team. Their bluster, in victory or defeat, is also starting to rub off on the others.

Kohli and his team have their sights on the South Africa series. A big win could actually pitchfork India to No. 2 in the International Cricket Council rankings, not too far from the No. 1 slot, Kohli told his players amid the celebrations in Colombo. India, stuck in that dark tunnel for four years of miserable Test cricket, finally seem to be waking up to a new and exciting dawn.

Follow the writer on Twitter @vikrantgupta73



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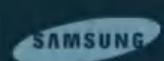
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THE AGE OF UNREASON

Dancing Shiva, the superhero; Mumbai, a city to which he cannot return; an election that turfs out the party of National Relatives; and a war of worlds between humans and jinns. Salman Rushdie's new novel is a product of our irrational times.

By Kaveree Bamzai

Mr Geronimo, gardener of the Lady Philosopher's thousand and one acre La Incoerenza; devoted husband of eternal optimist Ella Elfenbein, sometime object of affection of Princess Dunia, cannot ever go back home. He can create a beautiful garden, save the world from dark jinns (the evil creatures made of smokeless fire), and occasionally live several feet above the ground. But the city where he was born as Raphael Hieronymus Manezes, whose streets he walked knowing they were his, whose Sandras he kissed in the choir stall while his unacknowledged father thundered from the pulpit, where his story is a part of the story of those streets, he cannot ever go back there. "Let me belong again," he thinks. But Bombay itself has changed—the wide skirt has been replaced by the narrow mind, the majority rules, the minority is out, and being a little bit of everything has become not just passe but perilous.

"No need to bring Hindu extremists into it," says Salman Rushdie on Mumbai (*see interview*) but it is tempting to think of him as Mr Geronimo, "uprooted, not yet re-rooted, an alien of the uneasy feet", a broad-shouldered man who prefers the expansive to the narrow, the ample frame to the emaciated body, the wide fleshy lips to the pinched mouth, the roar to the whine, the loose over the tight, the everything-at-once-ness to narrowness.

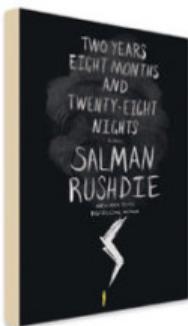
But then when has the world's most famous novelist ever written a book that is not steeped in the magical world of thunderbolt-releasing mortals and endlessly copulating Gods? That is yet grounded in the world of here and now? A here and now where an America is disappointed by a president of empty words, where a satanic warlord plans a sultanate of evil, and where a baby-faced tyrant orders his subjects to have the same haircut. "A sense of humour," says Rushdie, who is famously as old as free India, in his deadpan way, "is always a useful tool when reading my books." Ah, we all

know how that went down with *The Satanic Verses*, Ayatollah Khomeini and the fatwa of 1989.

Reading Rushdie's latest novel, *Two Years, Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*, highly anticipated as it comes seven years after his last novel *The Enchantress of Florence* and three years after his brilliant memoir *Joseph Anton*, is like curling up in bed with one's favourite blanket, slightly frayed, but warm and comforting. The prose is electric, the descriptions dazzling in their wordplay, the strangenesses multiple, and the guess-who-game as intriguing as ever. Strangely, he says, the book "took just about two years, eight months and twenty-eight days to write!"

Like the greatest novelists of the world, it is a contemplation on the Age of Unreason we live in. There is climate change that has caused a storm to fall upon our "ancestors" city like a bomb. "Their children slipped into the water and were lost, the piers built of memories on which they once ate candy and pizza, the boardwalks of desire under which they hid from the summer sun and kissed their first lips. Their power failed them. Darkness fell." There is the collapse of a nuclear reactor, the gang rape of a young woman, an avalanche. There are repeated attempts at the conquest of the land of A, now ruled by a murderous gang of ignoramuses, the Swots, masters of the art of forbidding things. The world is interconnected as the universe has always been, whether it is our master storytellers—Homer, Valmiki, Vyas, Scheherazade—or the Gods who congregate above and watch us in amusement—Indra to Zeus, or the contemporary articulators of our dreams, the hip-hop group Das Racist, the musician Lou Reed, or even the Faustian comicbook hero Spawn.

Rushdie, as always, takes us on a magical mystery tour of pop culture, from *X-Men* to *Walking Dead*, from Kim Novak to Jet Li, "those actresses so famous in before-time, Dimple and sister Simple", and there's even a mention of the late, unlamented *Anjaana Anjaani*—"I once had the good fortune to have lunch with Priyanka Chopra in New York,



Two Years, Eight Months
and Twenty-Eight Nights
Salman Rushdie
Hamish Hamilton
Pages 304
Price Rs 599

Photograph by ROHIT CHAWLA



“
A sense of humour is always a useful
tool when reading my books.”

Salman Rushdie

and she was filming something of the sort at the time,” he says. The War of the Worlds sees the collapse of borders between Peristan/Fairyland and the jinns at war with humans, as much as within themselves. But as much as it is global, it is about the India Rushdie has left behind. As Mumbai loses its civilisational grandeur becoming a city where “outsiders get it in the neck”, poor Mr Airagaira, an editor of books for young adults, is one among many rounded up to become a part of the new grand national enterprise, the construction of the machine of the future. And what does this machine, presumably made in India, produce? Why, glory of course!

Eventually though, it is up to the women to save the world. Rosa Fast, the recently elected mayor of New York; Storm Baby, whom she adopts and who has the power to identify the corrupt by inflicting moral decay on their bodies; Princess Dunia, who defeats her former playmates Zumurrud the Great and Zabardast the Sorcerer; Blue Yasmeen, the intrasexual performance artist who was “world famous on twenty blocks”; and Teresa Saca, the serial gold digger with the temperament of a shrew. Because only love can combat the horrors of hate and no one has a greater capacity to love than women. “I have always believed that women are the superior sex and nothing has happened in my life to change my mind,” says the man who has been married four times, the last to the glorious Padma Lakshmi, who makes an appearance in both *Fury* (2001) and *Joseph Anton*. There is a superhero too,

but he is of Indian extraction, Jimmy Kapoor aka Natraj Hero, the Bruce Wayne/Batman, only he is not a rich white man but a struggling would-be graphic novelist who lives with his mother and her birds in Queens. Rushdie became quite fond of him, and says “maybe he’ll get a spin-off series of his own”.

Love will be the cure, or more precisely sex—which when denied to male individuals who are either virgins or unable to find sexual partners, creates terrorists. Where the only prospect that awaits us is an alliance between Zumurrud who has a penchant for decapitations, crucifixions and stonings, and the vicious and illiterate Swots of A. Surely enough to provoke Rushdie’s old friends? He won’t say.

The stories we tell ourselves, each other, those are what sustain us. Perhaps there is no better nation than Amreeka where you can do that—retell stories, reinvent your own self in fact, where Gautama Chopra becomes Gotham (because, writes Rushdie slyly, he wanted so bad to be a New Yorker) and where Mr Johnson becomes Magic. And who better than the most famous imaginary descendant from the House of Ibn Rushd to give us our fictions. Because our fictions are killing us but if we didn’t have our fictions maybe that too would kill us—we who are the most resilient of all people who are able to confront the unimaginable, the unconscionable, the unprecedented. Rushdie, the ultimate prisoner of our collective conscience for 26 years, is quite happy to be a martyr for all of us. But no one could be a happier, wiser, smarter martyr than he.

Follow the writer on Twitter @kavereeb

INTERVIEW

“I AM NOT A FAN OF FAITH”

*Since Salman Rushdie burst into the world’s consciousness in 1981 with the stupendous *Midnight’s Children*, creating a new language for fiction, he has become one of the hallowed few the world is on first name basis with. One fatwa, four marriages, a knighthood, and 11 novels later, his appetite for fiction is undiminished. As he readies for the global publicity blitz for Two Years, Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights, he has some answers for questions from INDIA TODAY Editor-at-Large Kaveree Bamzai.*

Q. So has Bombay been changed beyond recognition by Hindu extremists, so much that Mr Geronimo could never go back?

A. No need to drag Hindu extremists into this. The feeling that “you can’t go home again” because the home you remember is no longer what it was is a pretty universal human feeling. Bombay has changed a great deal from “my” Bombay because people have died, moved away, grown, become different, and favourite places have disappeared, and the city has grown and shifted its focal points. It’s still fascinating to me, but Mr Geronimo feels alienated from it.

Q. Is embracing of love and rejection of faith the only way we humans can overcome this Age of Unreason? Can we not have faith and love together?

A. I’m not trying to preach! But I’m in favour of love and not a fan of faith, that’s true. In the novel, however, there is not a simple opposition between reason and unreason. Unreason, after all, includes fancy, dream, and so on, which can enrich our lives.

Q. You seem to suggest that the only way humanity can move forward is if it rejects dreams, because they bring nightmares too. Where will Ibn Rushd and his people (such as yourself) manufacture such magic then?

A. I’m not being didactic. I just wanted to portray a conflict in which no side is completely virtuous. And of course the loss of dreams would make the world a good deal more boring. More like the world of the jinn, perhaps.

Q. The book seems to encompass every contemporary event, from climate change to even the potential rise of Donald Trump (you call Americans Trump-crazy, and worryingly, they are).

A. Every book I’ve ever written arises out of long-term work joining forces, so to speak, with more contemporary

matters. Some of the stories woven into this novel (the construction of the glory machine, the tale of the man who falls quiet) have been around for a while. But yes, it's also a response to the world as it is now. Strangely it took just about two years, eight months and twenty-eight days to write!

Q. It's a global book, but it's also a very American book, a New York book. How does the city you live in now influence you?

A. I like in New York much of what I liked in Bombay, the crowd of stories, the sense of many different narratives intersecting, joining, conflicting, crowding in in one another. The stories of the whole world are here, becoming New York stories on New York streets, enriching American (and everyone's) literature as they get written.

Q. So is Dancing Shiva the new Batman? And Jimmy Kapoor the new Bruce Wayne?

A. I think I'll leave it to the reader to make up their own minds about Jimmy Kapoor and his Natraj Hero. He became one of my favourite characters. Maybe he'll get a spin-off series of his own.

Q. Are we, in India, in the midst of constructing the machine of the future? And does the national machine produce only glory? How do we fight the Age of Unreason?

A. The idea of the machine is not specific to any country or any time. It's a little bit of Kafka embedded in the novel. As to fighting the Age of Unreason, it would be helpful to find oneself a friendly jinn. But those bottles are hard to find.

Q. Is Geronimo's desire to go home also yours?

A. I am home. I've lived in New York for the past 16 years and feel content.

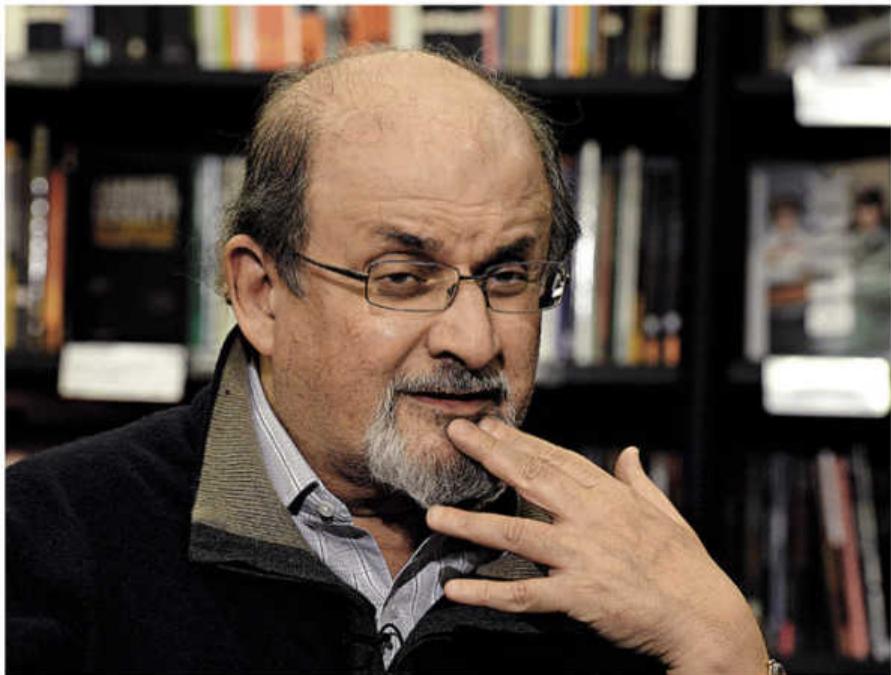
Q. As you (and we) grow older, do you see yourself being drawn more to our traditional storytellers? You club all of them together, Homer, Valmiki, Vyas, Scheherazade. How has each influenced your work?

A. I think the old stories, Western as well as Eastern, have enormous power, and I like the modernity of many of them. In the Panchatantra fables, for example, the bad guys—the sneaky, wily guys—often win. Much more interesting than Aesop's homilies to behave well and not be greedy. The influence isn't that direct—it's more like a background music against which I set my own

“

I just wanted to portray a conflict in which no side is completely virtuous... As to fighting the Age of Unreason, it would be helpful to find oneself a friendly jinn. But those bottles are hard to find.”

“I have always believed that women are the superior sex and nothing has happened in my life to change my mind. Men, by contrast, are simple beings. ”



REUTERS

accounts of human beings in the world.

Q. So people turn to terror because they are denied sex? That should endear you to your friends!

A. A sense of humour is always a useful tool when reading my books.

Q. So is it agreed? From Rosa Fast to Princess Dunia, from Storm Baby to Teresa Saca, women will save the earth? Why do you think they are better suited? And thank you for being a feminist.

A. Well, not all of those women are “good”. Teresa, for example, is certainly a bad girl. But I'm extremely fond of her. And I have always believed that women are the superior sex and nothing has happened in my life to change my mind. Men, by contrast, are simple beings.

Q. So how exactly are you descended from Ibn Rushd?

A. By elective affinity. My father liked his work and so adopted “Rushdie” as our family name. As a result I became interested in the philosopher and I, too, felt the same attraction to his mind my father had. So: good choice, Abba. ■

EXCERPTS

BOMBAY

THE NARROW MIND REPLACES THE WIDE SKIRT. MAJORITY RULES AND MINORITY, LOOK OUT.

He had been born Raphael Hieronymus Manezes in Bandra, Bombay, the illegitimate son of a firebrand Catholic priest, more than sixty summers before the events that concern us now, named on another continent in another age of the world by a man (long deceased) who had come to seem as alien to him as Martians or reptiles, but was also as close, as blood could make him. His holy father, Father Jerry, the Very Rev. Fr. Jeremiah D'Niza, was in his own words a "huge orson of a man," a "whalesized moby," lacking earlobes but possessing, by way of compensation, the bellow of Stentor, the herald of the Greek army in the war against Troy, whose voice was as strong as fifty men. He was the neighborhood's leading matchmaker and its benevolent tyrant, a conservative of the right type, everyone agreed. *Aut Caesar aut nullus* was his personal motto as it had been Cesare Borgia's, either a Caesar or a nobody; and as Father Jerry was definitely not a nobody it followed that he must be Caesar, and in fact so complete was his authority that nobody made a fuss when he surreptitiously (meaning that everyone knew about it) made a match for himself with a grave-faced stenographer, a slip of a thing named Magda Manezes who looked like a fragile little twig next to the spreading banyan of the Father's body. The Very Rev. Fr. Jeremiah D'Niza soon became a little less than perfectly celibate, and fathered a fine male child, instantly recognizable as his son by his distinctive ears.

His father so apocalyptic in the pulpit hardly ever hit him, mostly just let his son's mouth run out of blasphemous steam, understanding that bastards have their resentments and must be allowed to air them in whatever form they come out, and after Magda's death—she was a polio victim in those olden days when not everyone had access to the Salk vaccine—he sent Hieronymus to learn a trade from his architect uncle Charles in the capital of the world, but that didn't work either. Later, when the young man closed the architectural office on Greenwich Avenue and started the gardening business, his father wrote him a letter. *You'll never amount to anything if you can't stick to anything.* Mr. Geromimo unstuck in the grounds of La Incoerenza remembered his father's warning. The old man knew what he was talking about.

That winter Uncle Charles suddenly announced he wanted to make a trip back to India, and took Geronimo with him. After the long years away their hometown was a shock to the eyes, as if an alien city, "Mumbai," had descended from space and settled on top of the Bombay they remembered. But something of Bandra had survived, its spirit as well as its buildings, and Father Jerry too, still going strong at eighty, still surrounded by the adoring women of his congregation, though probably incapable of doing much about it.

In the new Mumbai, after a lifetime's service, he was newly inauthentic, excluded by the rise of extremist Hindutva ideology from full membership of his country, from his city, from himself. "I tell you a family story now I never told you before," Father Jerry said. "I did not tell you because I thought, in my error, you were not truly a part of the family and for this I ask your pardon."

But if the story of Dunia the fertile maybe-genie-with-the-dark-brown-hair is true, if the Cordoban indeed planted his seed in that garden, then we are his bastard brood, the 'Duniazat' from which maybe down the centuries emerged our garbled 'D'Niza,' and the curse he laid upon us all is our destiny and our doom: the curse of being out of step with God, ahead of our time or behind it, who can say; of being weathercocks, showing how the wind blows, coal mine canaries, perishing to prove the air is poisonous, or lightning rods, through whom the storm strikes first. Of being the chosen people God smashes with his fist to make an example of, whenever he wants to make a point.

SAURABH SINGH

"Being a little bit of everything was the Bombay way," he muttered. "But it is out of fashion. The narrow mind replaces the wide skirt. Majority rules and minority, look out. So we become outsiders in our own place, and when trouble comes, and trouble is coming for sure, outsiders have a habit of getting it in the neck before anyone else."

Geronimo Manezes walking his formerly beloved streets realized that something had broken. When he left "Mumbai" a few days later he knew he would not return.

The years ran on some more. The trouble Father Jerry had predicted



came to Bombay which had become Mumbai and there was a December and January of communal rioting during which nine hundred people died, mostly Muslims and Hindus, but, according to the official count, there were also forty-five "unknown" and five "others." Charles Duniza had come to Mumbai from Goa to visit the Kamathipura red-light district in search of Manjula, his favorite *hijra* "sex worker," to use the new morally neutral term, and found death instead of sex work. A mob angered by the destruction in Ayodhya of the Mughal emperor Babar's mosque ran through the streets and

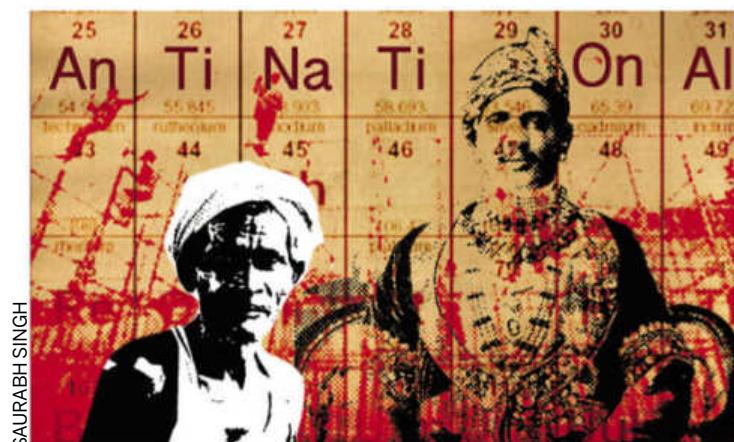
perhaps the first victims of the Hindu-Muslim troubles were a Christian "other" and his transgender whore, an "other" of another kind. Nobody cared. Father Jerry was off his turf, at the Minara mosque in the Pydhonie district, trying, as a "third party," neither Muslim or Hindu, to use his long eminence in the city to calm the passions of the faithful, but he was told to leave, and maybe somebody followed him, somebody with murder in mind, and Father Jerry never got home to Bandra. After that there were two waves of killings, and Charles and Father Jerry became insignificant statistics.

MR AIRAGAIRA AND THE NATIONAL RELATIVES

ANTINATIONAL ELEMENT IS AN ELEMENT FOR WHICH THERE IS NO LONGER ANY PLACE IN OUR PERIODIC TABLE.

That morning after the general election, O illustrious King, a certain Mr. Airagaira of the distant city of B. was awoken like everyone else by loud sirens followed by a megaphone announcement from a flag-waving white van. Everything was about to change, the megaphone cried, because it was what the people had demanded. The people were sick of corruption and mismanagement and above all sick of the family that had had a stranglehold on power for so long that they had become like the relatives everyone hates and can't wait until they leave the room. Now the family was gone, the megaphone said, and the country could finally grow up without the detested National Relatives. Like everyone else, the megaphone said, he was to stop working immediately at his present job, a job which as a matter of fact he enjoyed—he was an editor of books for young adults, at a prominent publishing company in the city—and report for duty at one of the new assignment stations that had been set up overnight, where he would be informed of his new employment, and become a part of the new grand national enterprise, the construction of the machine of the future.

He got dressed quickly and went downstairs to explain to the officer with a megaphone that he possessed neither the necessary engineering skills nor mechanical aptitude for such a task, being a person *from arts side not science side*, and besides, he was content to allow things to remain as they were, he had made his choices, and selected career satisfaction over the accumulation of wealth. As a confirmed bachelor of a certain age, he had more than enough for his needs, and the work was valuable: the challenging, entertaining, and shaping of young minds. The megaphone officer shrugged indifferently. 'What's that to me?' he said in a curt, discourteous manner. 'You'll do as the new nation requests unless you want to be thought of as an antinational element. That is an element for which there is no longer any place in our periodic table. It is, as the French say, though I do not speak French, believing it to be alien to our traditions and therefore un-



important to know, *hors de classification*. The trucks will be here soon. If you insist on making your objection, take it up with the transportation officer.'

... If Rene Magritte had painted Stan Laurel in shades of light brown the result might have resembled Mr. Airagaira, grinning his vague, goofy grin at the gathering crowd, and blinking myopically at the herders corralling them, men with orange marks on their foreheads and long sticks in their hands.

One day, O illustrious King, Mr. Airagaira saw a terrible sight. There were men and women carrying building materials in metal pans on their heads, which was normal, but something was wrong with the shape of these women and men, they looked—he groped for the word—squashed, as though something far heavier than the building materials they carried were weighing down on them, as if gravity itself had increased in their vicinity and they were literally being crushed into the earth. Was that even possible, he asked his neighbors on the quality control belt to which he had been assigned, could it be that they were being tortured, and everyone he asked said no with their mouths but yes with their eyes, no, what a

suggestion, our country's free, said their tongues, while their eyes said don't be a fool, it's frightening to utter such thoughts aloud. The next day the squashed people had gone and the pans of construction materials were being borne by new carriers, and if Mr. Airagaira saw something a little compressed about these persons too he kept his mouth shut about it and only his eyes spoke to his fellow workers, whose eyes spoke silently back. But keeping your mouth shut when there's something you need to spit out is bad for the digestion, and Mr. Airagaira went home feeling nauseous and close to throwing up explosively in the transportation truck, which would have been, to use one of the new words of those days, inadvisable.

'No questions,' said the orderer. 'Go about your appointed tasks.'

'The question is this,' Airagaira Sahib continued, having abandoned his gentle, confused, myopic voice for these new, stentorian, even megaphonic tones. 'What

does the machine of the future produce?'

'What does it make?' the orderer screamed. 'It makes glory! Glory is the product. Glory, honor and pride. Glory is the future, but you have shown that there is no place in that future for you. Take this terrorist away. I will not allow him to infect this sector with his diseased mind. Such a mind is a bearer of the plague.'

The crowd was unhappy as the herders made a grab for Mr. Airagaira but then people began to scream, because the electricity that had been crackling around the ears of the former publisher of books for young adults was seen flowing down his neck and arms, all the way to his fingertips, and then bolts of high-voltage electricity poured out of his hands, killing the orderer instantly, sending the herders running for cover, and striking the machine of the future with a violence that caused a sizable sector of the colossal behemoth to buckle and explode.

SEXUAL BOYCOTT

WHEN YOUNG MEN WERE PROVIDED WILLING SEXUAL PARTNERS, THEY LOST INTEREST IN SUICIDE BELTS, BOMBS.

When Dunia addressed the gathering and called for an immediate and comprehensive sex boycott to punish the dark jinn for Shahpal's murder and force them to end their improper campaign of conquest on the earth below, however, her audience's sympathy for her loss was not sufficient to prevent many of the gathered jinnia from expressing their shocked disapproval. Her childhood friend Sila, the Princess of the Plain, articulated the general feeling of horror. "If we can't have sex at least a dozen times a day, darling," she cried, "we might as well be nuns. You always were the bookish one," she added, "and quite frankly a leetle too much like humans, I love you darling but it's true, so maybe you can do without sex more easily than the rest of us and just read a book instead, but we, darling, most of us, it's what we do."

"My father is already dead. Why do you imagine your kingdoms—your fathers, your husbands, your sons, and you yourselves—are safe?" At which the gathered queens and princesses, of the Plain, the Water, the Cloud, the Gardens, the Night, and the Flame, stopped complaining about feeling horny, and paid attention; and their entourages too.

We, looking back on these events, see them through the perspective of our hard-won knowledge, and understand that the practice of extreme

violence, known by the catch-all and often inexact term terrorism, was always of particular attraction to male individuals who were either virgins or unable to find sexual partners. Mind-altering frustration, and the damage to the male ego which accompanied it, found its release in rage and assaults. When lonely, hopeless young men were provided with loving, or at least desirous, or at the very least willing sexual partners, they lost interest in suicide belts, bombs, and the virgins of heaven, and preferred to live. In the absence of the favorite pastime of every jinni, human males turned their thoughts to orgasmic endings. Death, being readily available everywhere, was often an alternative pursuit to unavailable sex.

SAURABH SINGH



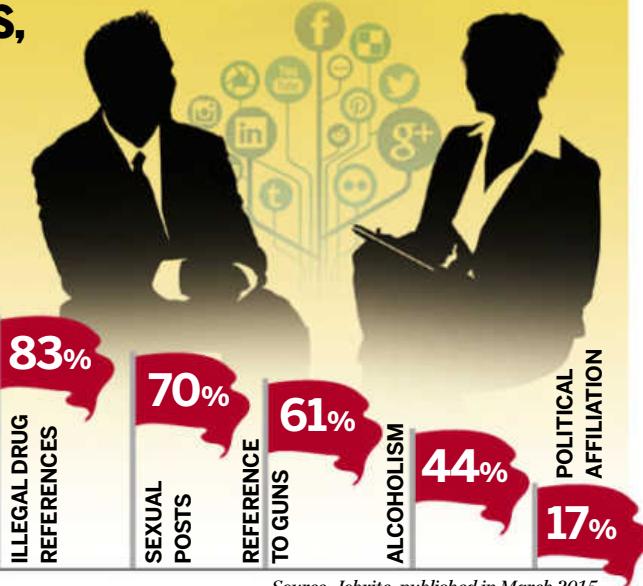
So it was with human beings. The dark jinn, however, did not consider self-immolation. Their response to the sex boycott was not surrender to the wishes of their erstwhile jinnia partners, but rather an increase in violent activity of the nonsexual kind. Ra'im Blood-Drinker and Shining Ruby, inflamed by the denial of physical pleasure, embarked in the lower world on a savage rampage of subjugation by force, displaying an intemperate abandon which at first alarmed even Zumurrud and Zabardast; then, after a time, the same red mist rose in the eyes of the two senior jinn, and the human race paid the penalty for the jinnias' punishment of the Grand Ifrits. ■

Graphic by NAOREM SANJOY SINGH



JOB SEEKERS, BEWARE

What are red flags for recruiters when they look up applicants on social media?



Source: Jobvite, published in March 2015

Mistaken Identity

Mumbai-based entrepreneur Hardik Shah was harassed on Twitter after netizens mistook his Twitter handle @hardik for that of Hardik Patel, the man who is in the middle of a controversy in Gujarat for his 'quota' war. Shah has changed his user name to "NOT Hardik PATEL" and is asking tweeters to direct their anger at the right man.



NOT Hardik PATEL



Joys of Being a Granny



More than 60,000 netizens watched a video of a woman reacting to the news of becoming a grandmother. Videographed by one of her sons, the woman's reaction—she is seen immediately obsessing about the diet and medication for the would-be mother—amused netizens.



Rugby, Like Never Before

A 2004 Telugu film, *Sye*, that depicted the game of Rugby in a bizarre fashion—players kick and bite each other and take cigar breaks—is back in news after amused Rugby playing nations such as Wales and New Zealand shared it on a Reddit thread recently. It has been viewed more than 80,000 times.



Follow the writer on Twitter @lkummi

viralvideo

More than 10 million netizens were amused to see Miley Cyrus, disguised as a reporter, questioning the public about her.

Three million netizens watched Taylor Swift and Lisa Kudrow sing 'Smelly Cat', a track Kudrow made famous on *FRIENDS*.

A video of artist Banksy's new theme park, Dismaland, a take on Disneyland, shocked 2 million.



Southern Sirens



YouTube channel Enna Da Rascalas had roped in YouTube beauty expert SuperPrincessjo to recreate the looks of South Indian heroines spanning over 70 years. Over 50,000 people have watched the video showcasing the looks of actresses such as Padmini, T.R. Rajakumari and Trisha.



For the Love of Salman



A three-year-old girl proposing to Bollywood actor Salman Khan has gone viral and has already got more than 700,000 views. The video gained attention when Khan posted the video of baby Nitya dancing and declaring her love on his Facebook page.

what's new
App Alert


App in the Air acts as your personal travel assistant, giving you information on airports and flights.



Ninja Snap stealthily takes pictures of people snooping through your phone.

CHIC SEWA

Fashion designer Anita Dongre looks to reinvent iconic woman's brand SEWA as part of her mega expansion plan

By Gayatri Jayaraman

Large French windows to let the rolling hills of an otherwise industrial Rabale in, the porosity of breathable stone, printing design blocks forming patterns on the walls, and wooden swings at every open nook across the three floors, this is what the Rs 350-crore designer label Anita Dongre's spanking new design facility in Navi Mumbai looks like under the seam. The bridal collection is being readied to move into stores the next morning. A powder-blue lehenga has some last-minute kantha work being finished up, rows and rows of *karigars* (workers) are filling out pink peacocks, silver mangos, and floral designs in Jaipuri gotapatti by hand. To the left of the workshop is a photography studio, replete with model and photographer clicking away.

The design factory, a dream come true for Dongre, comes with three adopted strays who lounge about lazily. Shifting out of the city not only integrates her various labels—the western work and casual wear label AND, the more peppy bohemian chic GlobalDesi, and the haute bridal functions—along with marketing and other administrative functions, but also has given her the space to bring her experiments to the fore. "There was a time 25 years ago when the western world used to come to India and use our *karigars* as an outsourcing hub, cheap labour for



ACTOR DIANA PENTY AND CRAFTSWOMAN BACHUBEN, THE FACES OF THE INAUGURAL CAMPAIGN OF GRASSROOT, ANITA DONGRE'S COLLABORATION WITH SEWA

their designs,” Dongre says. It’s been her long-time dream to establish the large-scale utilisation of Indian handcraft as an end in itself, and a vocal contributor to the Indian voice in fashion design.

Expansion has always come fortuitously to Dongre, from her first workshop in a garage in Bandra, sitting on bales of cotton cloth some 20 years ago. She launched AND from a realisation that what she was making was not what she or her friends were wearing. It became India’s first workwear label at a time when you had to shop overseas to find a wearable cut, and when most Indians were embellishing clothes with high doses of bling.

The hand embroidery industry is a word-of-mouth process, and it has been Dongre’s personal principle to never say no to work. “I don’t believe in charity. But if someone comes to me and says ‘I need a job’, I’m never going to say no. I believe it becomes my job to create that means of employment,” she says. After searching for dhurries for this new facility and failing to find them, she commissioned them to be made by weavers in Varanasi.

Grassroot was a label Dongre had begun with a vegetable dye and block-printing collections some seven years ago. “When you uproot people from their homes, migrant labour also has physical, sociological, sexual impact. It’s not enough to say a man is now earning six times what he would have been earning in his village. He is also away from his family, and you are in effect breaking up a social unit,” Dongre says.

It became important to her to start finding a way to offer work in villages that could be utilised by designers, each where they sat. As an idea, it started and stopped. Then, Saumya, a friend of her son’s and a social worker, came to meet her at home and ask if she might help reinvent SEWA, Self Employed Women’s Association, a 40-year-old iconic organisation working in hand embroidery, run by the legendary Ela Bhatt, and with 9,000 women on its roster. It was the cue she needed to jump into a collaboration.

SEWA, after four decades, had run into a dead end. Their clothes were not

selling due to a lack of contemporising. They knew they needed to modernise to survive, but the designers they were meeting were simply not able to connect with their craftswomen. Dongre began by sending design teams into the villages with the women of SEWA in Gujarat to discover what they could do. She began with 200 women. Then, seven months ago, Dongre went into Varanasi. Now, the ongoing project reaches out into villages across India, fuelling the need for a retail outlet, which she launched on August 12 through her own shop-in-shop labels.



IT IS VITAL, DONGRE SAYS, FOR INDIAN FASHION TO LOSE THE OBSESSION WITH GLAMOUR AND TO LOOK AT THE WOMAN ON THE STREET.

“Fashion is change. You can’t take the same mirror work and put it on a choli, the young are not buying. You have to contemporarise the craft for a 28-30-year-old to come in and say ‘this is cool’,” she says. As a designer, she says the challenge was going in, discovering the skill of the crafts-woman and getting her to adapt it to a relevant style. “I convert it into a beautiful skirt, jacket, something that urban women today recognise without messing with his craft. I have to tell him this colour sells today, this design sells today, this pattern or cut

sells today,” she says. The changes she put into SEWA designers who typically drew their own patterns, was to make their designs more geometric, and put them into more updated patterns the young could relate to. “I had three principles I wanted to run Grassroot by: the fabric would be eco-friendly, a craft that would sustain by it, and it would provide employment, especially for women,” she says. Working with women such as Bachuben, a crafts-woman with SEWA who had never been to the city that has for decades worn her designs, has been among the big takeaways. Bachuben, along with Diana Penty, is part of the Grassroot inaugural campaign. “We value our partnership with Anita Dongre in connecting the local skills of the rural artisans to the national and global market,” says Reema Nanavaty, who heads SEWA’s economic and rural development activities.

Dongre’s entire brand identity has been shaped upon the premise of the now. Her immense connect, she says, comes simply from the women she spends time talking to around her. “Women today are not women of 25 years ago. Then, a woman at her wedding wore what her mother-in-law told her to and was in tears by the end of the day.”

It becomes vital to the Indian voice in design, Dongre says, for Indian fashion to lose the obsession with glamour and to look at the woman on the street. That connect is crucial, she says, and Indian designers today are realising that the big business is not a mere ramp walk with Bollywood stars on the front row for glamour, but equally an investment in a sustainable business and craft, of fashion.

Today’s woman is independent, working, spends her own money, is value-conscious, wants minimal fuss and is not as interested in telling the world she’s wearing a 20 kg lehenga as she is in wearing something light and no fuss that she would enjoy wearing again. “Class is not the price of an outfit, but how it makes you feel when you wear it. So you have to design for the woman you know, not the woman you imagine,” Dongre says.

Follow the writer on Twitter @gayatri_j

BEZOS' EXPERIMENT

A controversy has been brewing worldwide ever since *The New York Times* published a scathing article on August 16 on e-retail giant Amazon.com's "brutal work culture". It talks about company founder Jeff Bezos conducting an experiment on "how far it can push white-collar workers to get them to achieve its ever-expanding ambitions".



“IT'S NOT EASY TO WORK HERE, BUT WE ARE WORKING TO BUILD SOMETHING IMPORTANT, SOMETHING THAT WE CAN ALL TELL OUR GRANDCHILDREN ABOUT. SUCH THINGS AREN'T MEANT TO BE EASY.**”**

Jeff Bezos

Founder, chairman, president and CEO of Amazon.com

POINTERS TO AMAZON'S RELENTLESS EFFICIENCY

NYT lists out some eye-popping practices followed at Amazon

- 80-hour workweeks. No excuses, even if you're a new mother or a cancer patient.
- Feel free to criticise colleagues, openly or secretly, through Anytime Feedback Tool.
- Underperformers nixed in annual cullings called "purposeful Darwinism".
- Be available during holidays and pay for business calls out of pocket.

OUR STRANGE W

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE AN IDEAL ORGANISATION OR THE PERFECT COLLEAGUE?

THE WAY WE WORK NOW

HOW MUCH OR HOW LITTLE, AND WHEN? A COMPARISON ACROSS THE WORLD



HOW MANY HOURS A WEEK?

30-40 HOURS UK, China

40-50 HOURS France, India, Germany, Japan, Italy, Brazil, Russia, United States



CASUAL OR FORMAL?

50% office-goers come to workplace wearing suits and ties in India, the highest in the world, compared to 11% in the US



TALK, MEET OR GO ONLINE?



OUT OF OFFICE?

46% in Japan take off for over a month from office every year, the highest in the world

DAYS OF LEAVE

0-7

8-14

Italy **64%**

UK **29%**

Brazil **20%**

India **34%**

US **27%**

COLLEAGUES FROM HELL

Rudeness at work hurts profits, health and



EXCLUDER

You don't exist for them if you don't serve personal gain.

Solution: Keep communication to the minimum. Don't express emotions.



INSECURE

Think they know the best, micro-manage everything.

Solution: Keep them updated. Keep your work and deadlines tidy.



TOXIC

Game-player, sucking up and stabbing people on the back.

Solution: Keep away. Refuse to gossip or act on any advice from them.



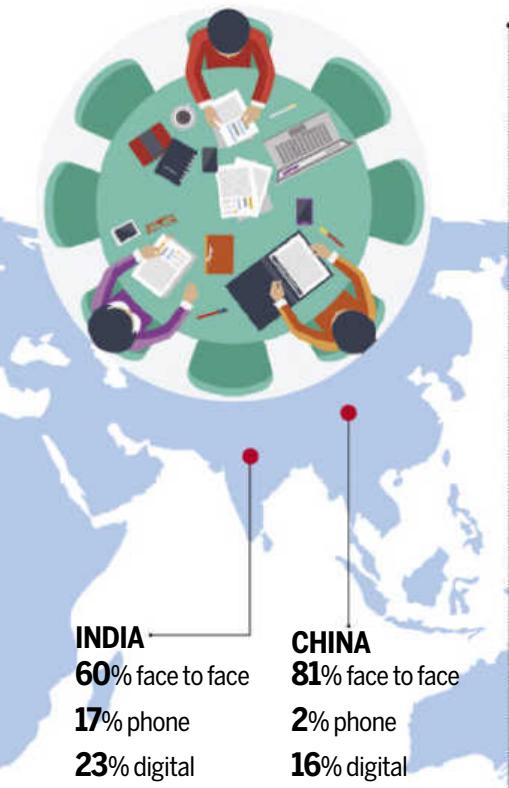
NARCISSIST

Egomaniacs who want everyone to feed their ego.

Solution: Don't express emotions. That way you won't feed their ego.

WORLD OF WORK

THINK ABOUT IT ON SEPTEMBER 4, THE 'BRING YOUR MANNERS TO WORK' DAY



MEETING UP AFTER WORK?

China **98%**
India **93%**
Brazil **76%**
US **41%**
Germany **38%**



BRINGING WORK HOME?

"Yes, once a week"
China **29%**
India **26%**
"Never"
Japan **59%**
Italy **43%**



15-21 22-28 29-35 35+ DAYS

Category	China (%)	Russia (%)	Germany (%)	Japan (%)
15-21	28%	35%	30%	46%
22-28				
29-35				
35+ DAYS				

(Source: Survey conducted online by Harris Interactive on behalf of CareerBuilder, 2013-14)

happiness. Yet mean colleagues are never in short supply.



SCREAMER

Yells, insults, abuses.
Calls for attention.



LIAR

Great manipulator,
makes excuses.



INCOMPETENT

Makes others do
their work and
takes the credit.

Solution: Don't
trust them. Docu-
ment incidents
to keep yourself
out of trouble.

Graphic by NAOREM SANJOY SINGH

(Source: Bullies, Jerks and Other Annoyances: Identify and Defuse the Difficult People at Work, Harvard Business Review, 2014; psychotherapist Jonathan Alpert's Be Fearless: Change Your Life in 28 Days, 2012; psychologist Meredith Fuller's Working with Bitches, 2013)

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Downlighter



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LED Tubes

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EYECATCHERS



DATELINE BUSAN

Ever since **Rajkummar Rao** won the National Award for his performance in Hansal Mehta's *Shahid*, things have been rather rocky. But Rao is hoping that his new collaboration with Mehta will reap dividends. In *Aligarh*, a film based on a true story, Rao plays a journalist who covers the case of a professor who is suspended for being gay. The film premieres at the Busan International Film Festival in October.



PRIMA DONNA

At a fundraiser in Mumbai, where Bollywood and business stars turned up to campaign against human trafficking, **Amruta Fadnavis**, wife of Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis, turned out to be the prima donna with a musical performance. Amruta has sung at a few charity events in the past too. **by Aditi Pai**

HOW WAS THE WEEK?



GOOD
Women's Hockey Team
Qualified for the 2016 Rio Olympics, marking India's return after a gap of 36 years.

▪ Compiled by **Suhani Singh** Follow the writer on Twitter @suhani84



DELHI BELLE

Delhi has given its fair share of actresses to Bollywood. There's Richa Chadha and more recently Shweta Tripathi. The latest is **Shivani Raghuvanshi**, 24, who makes her debut in Dibakar Banerjee's *Titli*. Even before the release of this gritty, Yash Raj-produced family drama in October, Raghuvanshi has bagged her next project. This one is produced by Imtiaz Ali and will see her opposite Rajat Barmecha, best known for *Udaan*.

AUTO BIOGRAPHY



Toronto-based filmmaker **Elisa Paloschi**'s documentary *Driving With Selvi*, about a young girl who fights patriarchy, will be screened in India soon. The film follows *Selvi*, a former child bride, over a 10-year-journey, as she escapes her abusive marriage, overcomes suicidal thoughts, and becomes arguably the first woman taxi driver in south India. Selvi now has her own taxi company in Mysuru and leads seminars to educate other women.

by **Moeena Halim**

ZITAR ATTRACTION

Fusion musician **Niladri Kumar** is already a star of Indian classical music, having created the instrument zitar, which he swings emphatically like a rock star would the guitar. Kumar will take centre stage at India's coolest gathering of music aficionados, the NH7 Weekender festivals in Pune and Kolkata. He won't be the only classical artist out there: violinist L. Subramaniam is also making his Weekender debut.



PARVEEN NEGI

BAD
Kamal Swaroop

The CBFC twice rejected the filmmaker's documentary on the 2014 elections in Varanasi.



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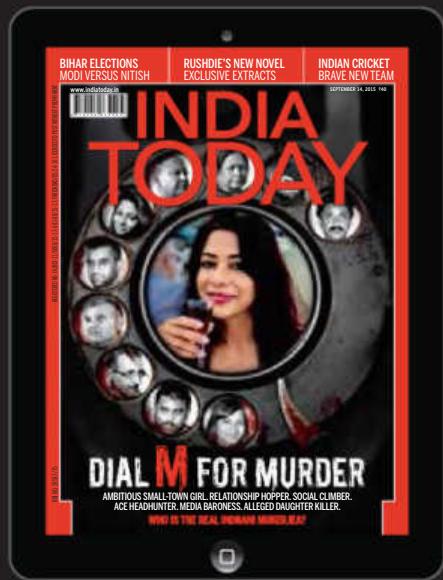


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Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV Model SEEP NARULA Makeup by SURKHAB ANJUM



COVER STORY

Slice of Nostalgia

2

From pre-partition eateries to modern dhabas, Simply Punjabi halts at some of the most popular eating joints.

CITY BUZZ

Into the City

12

A checklist on what to do, where to go and what to eat.

Cover photo by SANDEEP SAHDEV Cover model MANJOT KAUR

OUR PICK of the month



Bicycle Tour

September 13

Chandigarh was designed by French architect and urban planner, Le Corbusier, in 1953. To celebrate his death anniversary, Alliance Française (Indo-French cultural centre), in partnership with CITCO (Chandigarh Industrial and Tourism Development Corporation), will organise a bicycle tour to visit all the buildings built by the renowned architect.

Details chandigarh.afindia.org

Want to tell us about an event? A new store? A restaurant? People doing interesting things? Anything newsworthy? Please email us at: simplypunjab@intoday.com

SLICE OF NOSTALGIA

FROM PRE-PARTITION EATERIES TO MODERN DHABAS, SIMPLY PUNJABI HALTS AT SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR EATING JOINTS

By SUKANT DEEPAK

■ OLD FAVOURITE

{Rangla Punjab, Jalandhar }

People are playing hopscotch, children are taking aims with marbles, *bhangra* dancers move their bodies to resounding beats, an astrologer predicts future, a lone bull walks nonchalantly to pull water from the nearby well and an old Punjabi couple takes a round of the camps.

❖ **PAST PERFECT** Called Rangla Punjab, this 'home', built in 2004, and which serves a mouth-watering *thali*, attracts over 1,500 visitors every day. Waiters in colourful *kurtis*, long *kurtas* and traditional Sikh headgear, serve the thali comprising dal, paneer, mixed vegetable and a fried snack. And yes, endless rounds of *lassi* in earthen tumblers.

❖ **FLAVOURS OF HISTORY** "Check out the museum we built that houses ancient kitchen utensils, hand fans, *chulhas* and clothing," says DK Umesh, the general manager.

❖ **GET ON YOUR PLATE** The waiters ensure that your thali is never empty. Tell them to concentrate on serving the crisp paneer and saffron hinted smoky kheer.

❖ **MEAL FOR TWO** Rs 325 (Lunch) and 425 (Dinner)

❖ **AT** GT Road, Khajurula, Jalandhar

❖ **TEL** 01824501011

Photographs by SANDEEP SAHDEV, Model MAJOT KAUR





FOOD AND FOLK { Sethi Dhaba, Zirakpur }

Loud Punjabi music and a perpetual air of festivity never leaves this joint. Life-size mannequins all over the place stand tall and punctuate the movements of the waiters.

Amidst steaming food, there are counters where Punjabi music CDs are sold. Decorated with huge posters of Punjabi singer Gurdas Mann, the brightly-lit Sethi Dhaba provides a welcome visual relief on the monotonous Ambala-Chandigarh highway.

PAST PERFECT Though established just six years ago by Sonu Sethi, this dhaba's popularity has been soaring consistently. Sethi Dhaba enjoys immense patronage from people travelling from Delhi to Shimla, apart from local people from Zirakpur, Dera Bassi, Chandigarh and Panchkula.

"Those who have eaten here once know that they will be served absolutely fresh food prepared in the most hygienic

of conditions. We follow age-old Punjabi recipes but ensure that it appeals to the taste buds of all," he says.

FLAVOURS OF HISTORY Excited to share about live performances by Punjabi singers at his dhaba on weekends, the 38-year-old owner says, "Please do write that we are the only dhaba in the world to invite singers to sing for live performances. Mostly, it's restaurants meant for the rich who do it." Sethi also runs a free ambulance service for accident victims and was given the award of 'District Icon' by Punjab Cabinet Minister Bikram Singh Majithia on August 15 this year for his philanthropy.

GET ON YOUR PLATE Yellow dal, sarson ka saag, kheer and lassi.

MEAL FOR TWO Rs 150

AT Opposite Silver City, Ambala-Chandigarh road, Zirakpur

TEL 9888577438

Model SEEP NARULA | Makeup by SURKHAB ANJUM





■ THE SWEET AFTERTASTE { Khushi Ram and Sons, Ludhiana }

The road that leads to Khushi Ram and Sons shop in the congested Sadar Bazaar area is a one-way street, in every sense of the word. Customers are doing their best to get inside. Many other sweets shops in the market wear a deserted look.

❖ PAST PERFECT

Everyone believed that Khushi Ram Aggarwal, who started the shop, put a bit of magic in the *ras malai* and *ladoos* he made. Not just from the city, people from across the region would make it a point to specially visit the shop and try different products sold here. "My grandfather would tell long tales of Indians and British officers, who loved his preparations, and would narrate anecdotes of how the British could not believe that such sweet things could be made," says Rakesh Gupta, the third generation owner.

❖ FLAVOURS OF HISTORY

Things have not changed ever since the

place came into being in 1932. The establishment might have increased the number of shops to four across Ludhiana, but 53-year-old Gupta insists there has been no change in the quality they offer.

"We keep a close watch on the whole process—from procuring raw material to the final packaging," he says.

Lamenting that the demand for sweets and snacks has been going down consistently, especially among youngsters, Gupta blames it on the onslaught of western fast food joints. "For many, being seen at a multinational outlet is a kick in itself. Food be damned," he says.

❖ **GET ON YOUR PLATE** Motichoor ladoo, cream burfi, assorted namkeen. The shop is known for its fresh chhole bhature.

❖ **MEAL FOR TWO** Rs 200

❖ **AT** Chaura Bazar, Ludhiana

❖ **TEL** 01613256018





■ FIERY TREATS {Jawali Di Hatti, Jalandhar }

His ancestors told him tales of how British officers' wives would force their husbands to take them to the shop and insist that more of the spicy chutney be put on top of the *pakoras*. He also says that earlier people would wait for hours for their turn but now everybody is in a hurry. He tells us that all the children in the family now have professional degrees and may not want to sit at the shop—an establishment dating all the way back to 1852.

❖ PAST PERFECT They say in Jalandhar that everything can change but not the taste of Jawali's *dal pakoras*. Co-owner Vipin Goel, the sixth generation descendant of Jawala Parsad, who started the shop in 1852, says the taste of the delicacy remains the same, not because the secret family recipe has remained unchanged but also, "because there is a traditional commitment

towards patrons to serve nothing but the best."

❖ FLAVOURS OF HISTORY The 55-year-old owner says his day is made when an old client visits. "A gentleman, now around 90 years and settled in Canada, visits his relatives in Jalandhar every year. He never misses a visit to Jawali. He does not eat anything but says that there are some memories attached to this shop," says Prasad.

❖ GET ON YOUR PLATE It is tough to resist the *pakoras* once you have had a piece. Hot, crisp and with just the right proportion of spicy *masalas*, a single bite explains why. Don't order a cold drink. Instead go for their chilled lemon water.

❖ MEAL FOR TWO Rs 200 (approx)
❖ AT Sadar Bazaar, Jalandhar Cantt
❖ TEL 9814206896



THE EARTHEN POT {Kesar Da Dhaba, Amritsar}

The rain has not deterred the constant drizzle of customers to this place. Muddy street notwithstanding and ancient buildings enveloping Kesar, the decades old brass pots are burning bright inside its dreamscape kitchen. Waiters move in a certain automated rhythm.

❖ PAST PERFECT

Established in 1916 in Sheikhpura, Pakistan, this dhaba was the favourite eating joint of freedom fighters like Lala Lajpat Rai and his comrades, who regularly visited it to savour the dal and *paranthas* served here. "My forefathers had never-ending tales of those times. Tales that they would keep repeating," says Vijay Sharma, the third generation owner of Kesar. Kesar Da Dhaba, which shifted to Amritsar after partition in 1947, has retained both the recipes and cooking style that was followed ever since it was established. "Under no circumstances do we tamper with the original recipes. This is our way of honouring our forefathers," says the 55-year-old.

❖ FLAVOURS OF HISTORY

"Till 1970s, we used traditional *chulhas* and firewood. The food is still prepared in brass pots, which give them a distinct flavour," says Sharma.

❖ GET ON YOUR PLATE

If food prepared in pure *desi ghee* does not give you cold feet, Kesar is just the place for you. The dal here is cooked on a slow burner for 24 hours before being served to customers. *Urd dal, chana* and *lachcha paratha* seem to everybody's choice at Kesar.

❖ MEAL FOR TWO Rs 300 (approx)

❖ AT Chowk Passian, Amritsar ❖ TEL 9888124219



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Opening Shortly at Elante Mall

MEATY AFFAIR {Pal Dhaba, Chandigarh}

Meet eaters swear by it. Generations have savoured the taste of delicacies here. Those who came for the first time now have dentures. Rickety chairs have given way to the constant hum of the air conditioners. Pal's urban legend lives on.

❖ **PAST PERFECT** Established in 1960, when Chandigarh was still finding its feet as a planned city, Pal, which started its operations with one booth and now has four, has been serving some of the best known Punjabi non-vegetarian delicacies in town.

❖ **FLAVOURS OF HISTORY** Despite the onslaught of multinational food chains, Pal's popularity has been far from dented. "Several chefs from well-known restaurants including those in five-star hotels come to us for meals," says Gurmeet Singh Pal, who established Pal. Pal adds, "I have always told my sons that the day even one customer leaves unsatisfied, we lose five. In our line of business, it is the word-of-mouth that matters most."

❖ **GET ON YOUR PLATE** Keema kaleji, brain mutton, butter chicken and mutton curry.

❖ **MEAL FOR TWO** Rs 350 ❖ **AT** Booth No. 165-166, Sector 28 D, Chandigarh ❖ **TEL** 01725078614



Model MALLIKA CHABBA





■ FROM PUNJAB, WITH LOVE {Zamindara Dhaba, Fatehgarh Sahib }

There are three ferocious looking Pakistani dogs in a cage outside the *dhaba*. The waiters insist that they are “innocent” and we must put our hands inside to pat them. The *dhaba* owner saves the day and we escape the ordeal.

❖ **PAST PERFECT** Jaswinder Singh Mann, the co-owner of Zamindara Dhaba that was established in 1999, says that the motive of running the place has never been to just earn money. “I don’t say that we are not going in profits. But ever since we set up shop, we were clear that the concept of *seva* was paramount for us,” he says. Sick people going on this route know that something special would be prepared for them and extra attention given to make them comfortable. And this is what makes the *dhaba* so popular among locals and travellers.

Pointing towards well-off landlords, industrialists and daily wagers eating in the air-conditioned hall, Mann says, “It’s the word-of-mouth publicity. But more than that,

it is our hospitality that brings people to this place. The butter and unlimited *lassi* come without extra cost with meals.”

❖ **FLAVOURS OF HISTORY** Zamindara Dhaba’s cooks are always ready to serve everybody—from top corporate executives travelling on this road to local villagers who come for a meal anytime of the day.

“The combination of our *paranthas*, white butter, green chutney and *lassi* is well-known,” he says.

If you are a paneer fan, the Zamindara Special Kadhai Paneer, with piping hot *rotis* straight from the tandoor make for a great lunch.

❖ **GET ON YOUR PLATE** The Zamindara special thali comprising *paranthas*, white butter, *lassi* and green chutney.

❖ **MEAL FOR TWO** Rs 200

❖ **AT** Ludhiana-Chandigarh road

❖ **TEL** 01612539422

“CHANDIGARH IS AN URBAN PLANNING, NOT AN ARCHITECTURAL, MASTERPIECE. PIAZZAS MAKE SENSE IN EUROPE, WHERE THERE IS LESS SUN, BUT NOT HERE. THIS CITY IS NOT ROOTED IN INDIAN ETHOS. IT IS SUCH AN ARROGANT STATEMENT.”



Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV

ZEN IN EVERY STONE

CHANDIGARH-BASED ARCHITECT NEHA AGGARWAL SAYS THE ENIGMA LIES IN DETAILS AND UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPTY SPACES

By SUKANT DEEPAK

It's nearing dusk and the inside of the under-construction building is engulfed in shadows. A lone bulb hangs in the worker's shanty.

When architect Neha Aggarwal was in school, she would be intrigued whenever the architect building their house would visit. "What fascinated me was the fact that he could visualise so clearly. It was almost like magic. He also enjoyed the conversations with me and told my father to encourage me to take up architecture. I was not sure about the profession but there was clarity that design was my true calling," says Aggarwal, who is the proprietor of the architectural firm, Studio Envisage, in Chandigarh.

After graduating from Chandigarh College of Architecture in 2004, Aggarwal, who avoids the cliché of worshipping Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead*, insists her philosophy has always been to make the buildings part of the surroundings and not superimpose them on the latter. "I have always believed in going back to the basics. You will see a lot of exposed bricks and mud in my work.

Courtyard Planning (houses built

around the courtyard), which was earlier followed in India, is back in vogue now," says the 34-year-old.

One of the few architects who does landscape design herself, Aggarwal prefers to be non-geometric when it comes to lawns. "The keyword for me is organic. I avoid everything manicured and ensure the house and its surroundings develop a personality of their own," adds the architect, who designs buildings in such a manner that they get natural light till late evening, helping in energy conservation.

Aggarwal, who has built several houses and commercial properties in the region, recently completed Resort Dharamashala in Blossoms village in Himachal Pradesh, which was a project closest to her heart. "The entire structure has been built with mud bricks that were fabricated on the site itself. Real wood was used in the balconies and railings. We also made the flooring with Jaisalmer wood, keeping it as close to nature as possible. The view of the Dhauladars through windows substituted for the paintings," she says.

Ensuring the use of locally sourced material also helps in giving employment to the people of the region. "We employed a lot of

artisans for the project. The mud houses and slanted roofs were done entirely by them as they have been working with that technique for years," she says.

Believing in providing tailor-made solutions to her clients, Aggarwal, who spends a lot of time chanting, says she is seeing a gradual shift in people's taste when it comes to residential designs. "Earlier, people would build houses for others—keeping in mind what others thought about their dwelling places mattered more. Now there is a reversal. Clients are ready to experiment and want their houses to reflect who they are," says the architect.

Talk to her about the much-hyped Soviet-style buildings in Chandigarh, quite divorced from Indian architectural sensibilities, where distinguishing one house from the other is almost impossible, and the architect says, "Let us not forget that this city is an urban planning, not an architectural, masterpiece. Piazzas make sense in Europe where there is less sun, but not here. Look at the abundant concrete used. Don't we all know that concrete absorbs and emits heat? This city is not rooted in Indian ethos and it's more of an arrogant statement."



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AT Cafe@JW, JW Marriott,
Chandigarh **TEL** 01723955555



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Till September 30, Every Friday

A fond cuisine from the east of the Indian subcontinent, Bengali food always leaves one asking for more. Go ahead and experience some authentic Bengali cuisine.

MEAL FOR TWO Rs 2,300 onwards **AT** Collage, Hyatt Amritsar
TEL 01832871234 ↓



A GRAND AFFAIR

With its wooden and glass walls, the seventy-seater Gourmet Nine may give you casual dining vibes, but the warmth of a fine dining experience is hard to miss. The place—serving authentic Parsi, Coastal, Bengali, Thai and Chinese fare, has re-launched its menu to coincide with its first anniversary at Hotel Turquoise. Launching the timed menu concept in the region, the restaurant offers to bring food at the table within twelve minutes, or the bill for the pending dishes is let off.

"Taste, and quality of food is given utmost importance here. If one dish can reach your table sooner than others, it doesn't mean that it will be lacking something in taste," explains Aditya Prabhu, the co-owner.

Coming to the elaborate dishes, you simply cannot have enough of Paneer Akuri, a wonderful Parsi creation, which is light and fluffy, and with lemon-coriander garnish, provides a subtle kick; the cashews are a wonderful addition to the texture.

The Margi Na Farcha, another Parsi dish, is an excellent form of fried chicken. The soft texture

when you bite into the chicken is a dream. The batter is very tasty, and the texture continues inside—the chicken is so soft to the bite, that an unassuming diner may even mistake it for fish.

The Potato Cheese Wraps is a take on vegetarian spring rolls. The filling of potato and cheese work excellently with the crispy texture of the wrap. The Karare Palak ki Chaat—deep fried spinach leaves tossed lightly in a chaat-styled batter—completely bowled us over. Best served hot, its crunchy texture and street-food styled presentation make it an amazing dish to bite into.

But perhaps one of the best dishes served to us was the Chapli Kebab. An Afghani delicacy which is made using minced lamb, this dish, with its taste, and texture is enough to stand tall against Bukhara.

The coconut dumplings are a concoction of deep fried balls of white chocolate, sprinkled with coconut shavings. The combination might seem odd, but the coconut shavings make it a wonderful dessert.

Meal for two Rs 1,500 **At** World Hotel Turquoise, 29/7, Industrial and Business Park Phase 2, Chandigarh **Tel** 9779122880

Photography by SANDEEP SAHDEV

GNA UNIVERSITY

(PUNJAB ACT NO 17- 2014)

GNA University is one of the industry led universities, approved by Govt. of Punjab. Promoted by S. Amar Singh Educational Charitable Trust, Jalandhar, the university has lush green upcountry campus located at Sri Hargobindgarh on Phagwara - Hoshiarpur state highway with easy road, rail and air connectivity. Being an industry led university; GNA University has set out a very clear agenda to have strong industry - academic interface.



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Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV

NEW IN TOWN / RAYA

FASHION VISTAS

Fashion curator Sahiba Brar, who held a formal preview of her unique concept lifestyle store, Raya The Lifestyle Store in Chandigarh, is optimistic that her venture will invite many patrons, thanks to the buying power and evolved tastes of the people in this region. The 33-year-old engineer from Bhartiya Vidya Peeth, Pune and an MBA-holder from Amity School of Business is the brain behind the outlet, which has been given an attractive vintage European feel and is done up in white and gold.

The Idea "During my many travels in India and abroad, I saw outlets that boasted of beautiful interiors and collections of the best pieces that top designers of the country and the world had to offer. The idea of 'Raya' came along and we identified the need in the Chandigarh market for a concept store that would house multi-designer pret and occasion wear, and not just wedding wear. We noticed that most people would go to Delhi for shopping. The store wants to target those customers," she says.

The Name Raya means queen and grand. Everything at this upmarket French style designer boutique is majestic. Top-end fashion sits alongside gorgeous statement accessories and great home decor, making Raya a retail destination for the fashion conscious.

For Sale "We endeavour to make our store a hub of all things beautiful and exciting. There is great brand mix of top fashion accessories also. Some names that the outlet boasts of are Suhani Pittie, Prerto, and Valliyan by Nitya," says Brar. **Cost** Accessories Rs 1000 to Rs 10,000; home décor Rs 500 to Rs 15,000; clothes Rs 2500 to Rs 50,000 **At** SCF 23, Sector-7C, inner market, Chandigarh

Tel 8130155153

■ **By Sukant Deepak**





Sound ↑ BEATS

September 23

Comprising a young French duo, Miscellaneous (MC) and Bankal (Beatmaker), Chill Bump was founded in 2010. The band has created its own universe, a world of lofty, uncluttered and sometimes abrasive beats over which Miscellaneous verbalises in English. The rapper ricochets from pure narration to social dissent, always in symbiosis with the musical production. The versatile consonance of Chill Bump's universe is structured by a solid rhythmic baseline.

AT Alliance Française, Chandigarh

BEANS OF JOY

Till September 30

Calling all coffee lovers to savour coffee of different flavours. Be it rich mochaccino, frothy cappuccino or dark espressos, you will be spoilt for choice. **COST FOR TWO** Rs 600 plus taxes **AT** The Gallery Bar, Kitchen at 95, Hyatt Regency Ludhiana



BEACH AND GRUB ↑ GOAN FOOD PROMOTION

Till September 13

Find yourself transported to the exotic beaches of Goa and revel in its culinary delights. Enjoy Goan favourites such as spicy prawn curry, fish ambotik, pork sorpotel, delicious mushroom tondak and lots more.

MEAL FOR TWO Rs 2,500

AT Kitchen at 95, Hyatt Regency Ludhiana

TEL 0161407 1234



NEW IN TOWN / JAGDISH STORES

Furnishing it right

After making its presence felt among admirers of fine home furnishings in cities like Delhi, Kolkata and Jaipur, Jagdish Stores launched its first retail outlet in Ludhiana in August.

The sprawling boutique-store, located on Main Feroepur Road, will stock the same quality and range of home-furnishings as its Delhi branch.

Exclusive fabrics, upholstery, mattresses and beds, table and bath linen, curtains and carpets will be available for the city residents, giving them an opportunity to shop for high quality and unique merchandise without having to travel to other cities.

The store also boasts of a team of trained interior designers and home stylists to take care of designing and

tailoring products for the clients.

Commenting on the launch, Jagdish Khandelwal, MD, Jagdish Stores, says, "Ludhiana is one of north India's most prosperous cities with an immense buying power. We already have a loyal clientele from this part of the country who patronise our Delhi store for their home furnishing needs."

"We're delighted that with the opening of this boutique, these patrons, and new ones, will not have to travel all the way to our other outlets to enjoy high quality furnishings, which have an Indian soul and an international appeal. We're looking forward to a long and meaningful association with the city," he added.

**At 1-H, Sarabha Nagar, Ludhiana
Tel 09888543569**



ROASTS ↑ AND GRILLS

Till September 30

The chefs are set to welcome you every Wednesday and Saturday to experience some great culinary delights using roast and grill methods.

MEAL FOR TWO

Rs 2,300 **AT** Collage, Hyatt Amritsar

INDIA
TODAY

A MONTHLY CITY MAGAZINE

SIMPLY BANGALORE

FASHION DESIGNER
RON DUTTA

FASHION FORWARD

DESIGNERS WHO ARE WEAVING A CHANGE



Photograph by NILOTPAL BARUAH

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COVER STORY A Fashionable Twist

s-4

Meet five young designers in the city, who are reinterpreting fashion to make a stylish difference.

Cover photo by NILOTPAL BARUAH

OUR PICK of the month

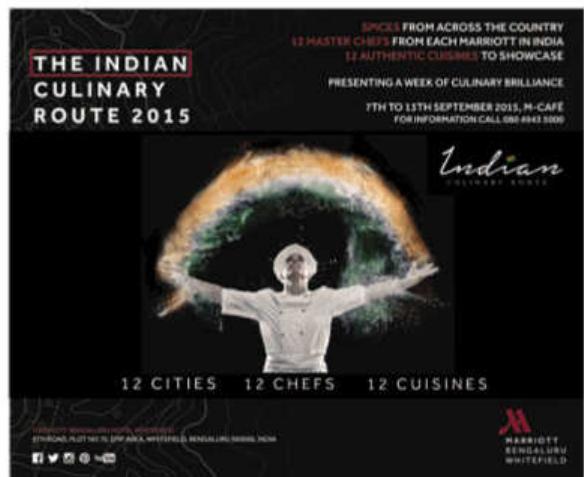
Food Soiree

September 7 to 13

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel, Whitefield is all set to take Bengaluru on a gastronomical journey with The Indian Culinary Route 2015.

Get ready to experience the tastes and flavours from regions across India as the hotel brings the whole country on a platter for Bangaloreons.

Twelve chefs from 12 cities across the country will put their expertise together to create some extraordinary magic with food, in this seven-day event. Each chef will prepare three authentic dishes from their specific region consisting of a main



course, starter and a dessert.
At 8th Road Plot No. 75, EPIP Area,
Whitefield
Tel 49435000

Want to tell us about an event? A new store? A restaurant? People doing interesting things?
Anything newsworthy? Please email us at: simplybangalore@intoday.com

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A FASHION

MEET FIVE YOUNG DESIGNERS IN THE CITY, WHO ARE

By DURBA GHOSH

Revival Instincts RON DUTTA, 36



seasoned fashion designer, Ron Dutta started Fatherland in 2014 as a project to revive and restore some rapidly vanishing Indian saree weaves in Bengal, Orissa and Karnataka.

► ROOT CAUSE

Hailing from a family engaged in promoting small-scale weavers of Bengal with the help of self-help groups,

which tied up with vendors, Dutta learnt the intricate art of handloom weaving early in life. "I am aware of Bengal weaving techniques because of my family, and later I discovered unique weaving traditions typical to Orissa, Karnataka and Goa during my travels to these states," says Dutta. "Some handloom weaves in these states have degenerated. I approached weavers of those specific crafts, gave them orders



ABLE TWIST

REINTERPRETING FASHION TO MAKE A STYLISH DIFFERENCE

Photographs by NILOTPAL BARUAH

and sold their products in Bangalore," Dutta added.

► TRIBAL TALES

Since its inception, Dutta has added three tribal weaving styles to Fatherland's saree collection—Kotpad from Orissa, Kornad from Tamil Nadu and Ilkals from Karnataka. While several apparel brands in Bangalore explore handloom garments, most are limited to popular heirloom designs such as Katha stitch of Bengal, temple motifs of Tamil Nadu or Benarasi work. Dutta travels to the

remotest corners of tribal areas to explore and research on weaving crafts that have already degenerated or are gradually dying. Dutta is now working on tribal weaving art of Orissa such as bondas, sauras, dongrias and dhorbas, who make niche Oriya motifs but are mostly inaccessible. Dutta has also identified some small pockets of master weavers called taniyars in Tamil Nadu and is promoting their art.

► **Price** Rs 600 to Rs 10,000

► **Available at** Fatherland Store, 31, 15th Cross, 11th Main, Malleswaram, *fatherland.in*



Talking Tees

ALICIA SOUZA, 28

A

Alicia Souza is the brain behind T-shirt label Chimpwear's popular designs, Yo-Ga Chimp and Napping Cat doodles. "I draw whatever is on my mind. Sometimes an activity as mundane as getting late for work becomes an inspiration for an illustration," says Souza.

► EARLY START

Ever since a little girl, Souza loved creating fascinating figures with just a pencil. No wonder she quit her job as a banker to follow her passion, after friends encouraged her to make doodling her profession. She soon started designing for Chumbak, the popular lifestyle products brand.

► BRANCHING OUT

After being associated with it for two years, Souza parted with the company in 2013 to design apparel, fridge magnets and bags independently. She set out as a freelancer, drawing quirky everyday cartoons for a sizeable and loyal online fan-base. She then went on to do illustrations for one of India's oldest institutions, Tinkle. Now, Souza is helming Mumbai-based Chimpwear's Bangalore chapter. Her catchy illustrations on organic cotton T-shirts include—Dakumentary (a dacoit holding a camera), Bai-Cycle (a house help riding a bicycle) and Kutta Pyjama (a dog wearing a pair of pyjamas).

► Price Rs 500 to Rs 1,200

► Available at chimpwear.com

► Facebook facebook.com/the.aliciasouza



The Lungi Man

ARUP NANJAPPA, 30

Call it a *lungi*, a sarong, a mundu, or a wrap-around skirt, Arup Nanjappa's collection of unisex *lungis* under the label Vimor, has created quite a buzz in the city's fashion circuit. Taking his family's legacy of handloom revival one step further, Nanjappa has transformed the everyday saree into a clever and stylish work of art.

► SAREE LEGACY

Vimor, which was launched 40 years ago as a small venture to train and encourage weavers to produce traditional and marketable sarees, has done pioneering work in reviving handloom saree designs in South India. In January, Nanjappa, the third generation owner of the label, decided to recreate the brand with a new segment of unisex *lungis*. Nanjappa got the idea of working with *lungis* during one of his visits to Sri Lanka, where it is an everyday garment.

► QUIRK QUOTIENT

He then did a research on countrywide *lungi* sales and found that about 90 percent of the market was for typical Tamilian white and golden *lungis*. But Nanjappa started designing *lungis* in vibrant colours, patterns and motifs. He then convinced the weavers to veer away from their dull palette and weave colourful checks. "It's a truly versatile style statement. Unstitched and at two metres of length, these funky *lungis* work perfectly as a wrap-around garment or a dupatta," says Nanjappa. His collection is made of hand-woven mulberry silk and pure cotton sourced from Karnataka. He uses traditional mustard seed sized checks and paisleys as patterns and innovative warp and weft combinations originating from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu for weaving. Nanjappa along with his mother Pavithra Muddaya has also documented the local textile vocabulary of the weavers.

► **Price** Rs 500 to Rs 3,000

► **Available at** 49, 3rd Cross, Victoria Layout

► **Facebook** facebook.com/VimorSarees

A Bold Stitch MADHURIMA BHATTACHARJEE, 32

Bored of purchasing run-of-the-mill ready-to-wear clothing available in the market, Madhurima Bhattacharjee bought a sewing machine a few years back and started stitching her own clothes. Her flair for designing garments drew appreciation from family and friends, who wanted her to create custom-made pieces for them. One thing led to another and Bhattacharjee quit her plush job as a communications engineer in 2014 to launch her eponymous fashion label. In March 2014, Bhattacharjee launched her debut collection at Bangalore's famous flea market exhibition, Sunday Soul Sante, with 60 odd pieces.

► FUSION FUN

Bhattacharjee's designs are a fusion of western style with Indian prints and funky patterns in vibrant colours. She likes to interpret global fashion trends in natural and organic yarns such as Khadi and cotton. Each design is done in just a few

pieces to ensure exclusivity. "I love pop colours and quirky patterns. Over the past year and a half, my instinct for patterns and fabrics has improved. I don't believe in designing clothes that just look good but are actually quite uncomfortable. I keep my style realistic and wearable. The idea is to make organic fabrics such as Khadi fashionable," says Bhattacharjee.

► SELF TAUGHT

With no formal training in fashion designing, Bhattacharjee has relied on the plethora of information available over the Internet to learn the basics of designing. The young designer believes the lack of formal training has helped her understand a woman's apparel needs. "My target is the contemporary urban woman, a professional, who loves to have fun and is fiercely independent," says Bhattacharjee.

► **Price** Rs 600 to Rs 2,000 ► **Available** at shopmb.in

► **Facebook** facebook.com/b.madhurima





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Whole Six Yards JONALI SAIKIA KHASNABISH, 40

Jonali Saikia founded Heeya in 2012 in an attempt to revive the tribal saree weaving techniques of the North East region. The IIM Bangalore alumnus, who primarily works with Eri Silk, believes the unique handicrafts and heirlooms of the North East region can create distinct identity for the weavers and place them on the global map. A native of Assam, Saikia's personal saree collection is dominated by traditional weaves from the tribal regions of North East like Wanchoos and the Singphos. While she garnered rave reviews for her saree collection, she soon realised that others had little or no idea about the rich fabrics and patterns that are typical to the region.

► DESIGN DREAMS

After spending more than 16 years as a consultant in the corporate world, Saikia decided to engage niche weavers in Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya with an aim to propagate

their weaving crafts. Saikia sources the yarn from local silk farmers and works with the weavers to create sarees with traditional motifs. Heeya's weaves are primarily from four areas—Chhayaon, Dhemaji, Nagaland, and Bongaigaon, which are fashioned into garments by Saikia. "The tribes use unique and distinctive patterns. They are not just something created from the imagination by the weaver, but have a cultural significance," Saikia says.

► STITCH IN TIME

Saikia's works are primarily inspired by nature and human communities. The intricate extra warp style of Bodos and extra weft styles of Mishings unique to this region also find way into Heeya's saree collection. Saikia also works with Assamese weavers who specialise in King Khab motifs.

► **Price** Rs 6,000 to Rs 20,000

► **Available at** Lakeview Farm, Ramgondanahalli, Whitefield, heeya.in

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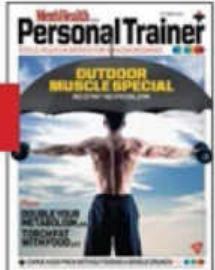
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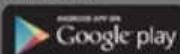


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